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October 18, 1892.

No. 795.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

Vol. XXXI.



AWAY THEY DASHED, AT A DEAD RUN, WHICH CONTINUED FOR NEARLY A MILE BEFORE THE OLD BUMMER COULD CONTROL THE LEAD TEAM.

Kit Bandy in Red Ruin;

OR,

The Young Whirlwind of the Hills.

BY OLL COOMES,

AUTHOR OF "HIGHLAND HARRY," "KIT BANDY RATTLED," "WHIP-KING JOE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LITTLE FURY.

Down the rugged mountain side, following a narrow goat-path that landed in Roaring Gulch, the lithe figure of a youth was coming while yet the summit of the snowy range blazed with the fiery gilding of the setting sun.

Up from the gulch, at the same time—like a murky mist—crept the shadows of evening, diffusing themselves among the rocks and bushes—hiding under their dusky mantle, as an assassin hides his dagger, the pitfalls and death traps of the dangerous trail. But, with the nimbleness of a deer, and the air of one who well knew the path he was following, the youth floated down into the deepening shadows.

Tall, slender, lithe of limb, supple as a young panther; an open, manly countenance; a keen flashing eye, an air of genteel yet dashing abandon—these were some of the attributes and characteristics of Little Fury, the Young Whirlwind of the Hills. His name was Frank Fewry, but had gained the sobriquet of Little Fury by the daring impetuosity with which he threw himself into the dangers of camp, hill, and trail.

In Roaring Gulch, at the foot of the hill the young scout was descending, lay the mining-camp of "Red Ruin." It then was one of the most exposed mining settlements among the hills of Colorado—exposed to both Indian and outlaw. But, the thirst for gold had led no less than a hundred men to pitch their tents there, a few even bringing their wives with them. A guard, however, was set over the camp—a skilled mountaineer who patrolled the hills almost day and night. That guard was Little Fury, who was on his return to camp when we introduced him to the reader.

The darkness became deeper as the boy advanced, but he moved on with a bounding stride, and was nearing the valley when he was suddenly brought to a halt by the peremptory order of a sharp, shrill voice, commanding:

"Hold up thar, stranger, afore you plunge in to my spinal column! What be you?"

"I'm Frank Fewry," quickly responded the boy; "who are you?"

"What, the Kid Whirlwind, be you?" queried the stranger.

"I guess so," answered the hill scout, smiling.

"Wal, then, by the great Rosycrusians! hand down your paw, boy, and honor yourself by shakin' the flipper o' Old Tom Rattler, the Red River Epidemic!"

"An honor, indeed!" exclaimed Little Fury, grasping the noted old hunter's hand; "I have heard of Tom Rattler, and am glad to meet him, and hope soon to look upon his face in the light."

"I'm better lookin' in the dark, boy, for old Time's been warpin' it to me lively o' late years; but thar's as frisky spirit inside this old hulk as ever raseed with a grizzly or made love to a maiden fair. I'm goin' to spend a night in Red Ruin Camp 'f I don't fall off this 'ere old Pisgah and kill myself. S'pose thar's whar you roost, Whirlwind?"

"Yes, sir," answered Frank; "let me go ahead, Mr. Rattler, and pilot you along. I know this path pretty well," and taking the lead, the boy assisted the old man along the dangerous path. Soon they reached Roaring Gulch and entered camp.

"You must be my guest to-night, Mr. Rattler," Little Fury announced, as they moved along. "I've a room down here in the rear of a miner's cabin where you'll be welcome as the Czar of Russia."

"Thanks, boy, thanks!" replied the old tramp; "I'll 'cept your invitation, Whirlwind, seein' I'm a stranger in Red Ruin. I may not be as handsome as the Scar o' Roosha, but I can give you some pointers, and tell you some things that'll make your young heart tater. Did ye ever hear o' Old Kit Bandy, Mountain Detective, prize fraud and diplomaed liar?"

"I've heard Bandy was a wonderful, eccentric old fellow, a terror to evil-doers."

"More'n that, boy," declared Old Rattler; "he

war a holy screecher. I do b'lieve if he'd set 'bout it he'd outwit, deceive, and out old Satan right on his own fodder-walk. Poor old scoundrell! I'd give a wisdom-tooth to see him. It's nigh onto two years since the vagrant swapped lies with me 'way up in Montanny."

Thus conversing, they came to the cabin of Captain Henry Vaughn, Mayor of Red Ruin.

"Tom, let's drop in here a moment; I report every evening to the mayor," explained the young scout, and so saying the two entered Vaughn's office. Tom was introduced to the handsome young mayor, who welcomed the old borderer to the hospitality of Red Ruin.

Little Fury made his report and was about to depart when the mayor said:

"Oh, yes, Frank! I'd nearly forgotten to say that Mr. Walworth requested me to have you call at his cabin to-night without fail. Don't forget to go up, Frank."

"Wonder if he intends to give me a share in the 'Jolly Jane?'" smilingly observed the young scout, as he and Old Tom departed.

Reaching his own dingy little room, Frank lighted a lamp, seated his guest and proceeded to prepare supper.

After their meal had been dispatched, Little Fury said:

"Now, Tom, if you'll excuse me a few minutes I'll run up and see Mr. Walworth. He's one of the finest men in this camp, and a good friend I like to oblige."

"All right, boy," replied Tom; "I'll amuse myself by cleanin' up my shootin'-irons."

Frank soon found himself in the presence of John Walworth, a pleasant man of some sixty years and the owner of two-thirds of the Jolly Jane, the richest mine in Red Ruin Camp.

"Captain Vaughn said you wished to see me," the boy observed, in a business-like way.

"Yes, indeed, I do, Frank," assured the old miner, closing the door and seating himself before the boy. "I received a letter to-day from my daughter, saying—"

"Your daughter?" exclaimed Little Fury, in surprise.

"Yes, from my daughter, Florence," answered the miner, a smile playing over his bearded face. "I know it will be a surprise to everybody to learn that I have a daughter; but such is the case. She's now eighteen years of age, and, as I was going to say, I received a letter from her to-day, saying that she was coming to Red Ruin to join me. I have not seen Flo for fifteen years. When she was three years old her mother died, and my sister took her into her home. I went to California, and have been knocking about here and there ever since, endeavoring to accumulate a fortune, and never, until I struck the 'Jolly Jane,' have I made more than a mere living. I wrote Florence of my good luck, and that I expected to visit my old home during the year. In answer to my letter comes one from her saying her aunt had died, and that she was coming to me, and even named the day she was going to start. Of course it's a surprise to me, but a very happy one. But the letter has been so long on the road that I have little time in which to prepare for her reception. In two or three days she will be in Leadville, where she wished me to meet her. This will be impossible, for I have not sufficiently recovered from my injury in the mine to make the journey, unless it be at the risk of my life. So I want you to go in my place, and meet her at Leadville, tell her of my inability to come, and that I sent you to escort her here. To be sure, she'll come through on the coach. Now, what do you say, my boy?"

"I'll go with pleasure," answered Frank, his face flushing with pride at the confidence placed in him.

"Thanks, lad; bring her through safe and I'll pay you well."

"I'll do my best," promised the youth; "I'll start before daylight in the morning. I'll ride my pony so's to get there on time. I'll prepare everything to-night, and when the sun rises I'll be miles from here. What shall I say to your daughter?"

The old man gave him a brief yet endearing message to be communicated to his child, and then the youth took his departure.

As he proceeded toward his own quarters, the young scout's attention was attracted by a roar of boisterous laughter in "The Magnet," Red Ruin's saloon and gambling-house.

Advancing to the open door, he looked in. The house was already full. Some were drinking, some throwing dice and some playing cards; but the center of attraction was an old bum whose tall form and long limbs were clad in rags, and his head surmounted by the remnant of an old army cap.

"Old Soaker," as he was called, had been lying around camp several days, drinking whisky at the miners' expense and furnishing no end of amusement to those who were attracted nightly to "The Magnet." He was the most odd, clownish old bum who had ever struck a mining-camp—a regular camp vagrant who scorned labor, and was totally impervious to the insults and jibes of roughs.

When Little Fury looked in upon the crowd, Old Soaker was standing in the center of a mob, holding a glass of liquor in his extended hand above the heads of those around him, making a foolish, maudlin speech—responding to the toast, "The health of Red Ruin."

As he listened to the bumper's talk, the spirit of mischief seized Little Fury, and, whipping out his revolver, he pointed it through the open door and fired.

As the weapon rung out, the glass and contents in the hand of Old Soaker vanished, and, as the shattered crystal and whisky-spray rained down upon the heads of the crowd, a roar of laughter, mingled with curses and cries of surprise, filled the room.

With a cry of "Murder!" Old Soaker sought refuge behind the bar.

But the excitement soon subsided when Little Fury was observed standing in the doorway with a mischievous smile upon his face, a pistol in his hand.

"That war a leetle reckless, but a dandy shot, Whirlwind," observed "Purple-Nose" Jack, an old miner and gambler.

Old Soaker crept from his hiding-place, threw off his cap, and declared his intention of licking the young scout; but the miners succeeded in quieting him with another glass of liquor, and with a wave of his hand Little Fury departed from The Magnet.

Returning to his room he told Old Tom of his intended trip to Leadville, and asked the old hunter to remain and keep watch over Red Ruin until he should return. The hunter agreed to do so, and the arrangements were at once made known to the mayor, who heartily approved of the same.

Long before daylight next morning Frank mounted his pony and started on his journey.

The night passed and day had just dawned when the startling cry of "Murder!" ran through the camp.

John Walworth, one of the proprietors of the "Jolly Jane," lay dead in his cabin, his skull crushed by the blow of a heavy bludgeon!

CHAPTER II.

TWICE HELD UP.

THREE days had passed. The tri-weekly stage-coach running between Leadville and Red Ruin was moving at a rattling pace up Roaring Gulch, bound for the last-named camp.

Old Hi Graves, a veteran of the Overland, handled the reins of the six mules, whose clattering hoofs, mingled with the grinding of the wheels and creaking of springs, woke the echoes of the dreary pass.

There were four passengers in the coach, three men and one woman.

Two of the men were evidently well-to-do Westerners. One of them, whom the other addressed as Major Hines, was a large, red-faced man, with a steel-gray eye and cold, expressionless face. The other was a swarthy-faced miner of Red Ruin named "Tac" Barnes. The third was evidently from the East—a tenderfoot. He was not over thirty years of age, well-dressed and gentlemanly in appearance and speech.

The woman's face was closely veiled. Her clothes were protected from the dust and dirt of the road by a long brown linen duster. Her hands were incased in black kid gloves. An occasional deep-drawn sigh or a sob escaped her lips, as if she was in deep sorrow. And she really was, for she was Florence Walworth, the daughter of the murdered miner, John Walworth.

The news of her father's death had reached her ears soon after taking the stage at Leadville for Red Ruin. The stage was met on the way by the miner, Tac Barnes, whom Dave Luce, Walworth's partner in the Jolly Jane, had sent to break the sad news to Florence.

The journey was indeed a sad one to the poor girl, and she would have turned back had such a thing been possible, the stage then being forty miles out from Leadville. Her sorrow threw a gloom over the spirits of the passengers. They expressed the deepest sympathy for her, and their kind words of comfort and assurance lifted some of the burden from her young heart.

But the maiden had little to say as they journeyed on. In fact, very little was said by any of the travelers, after Barnes, who had taken a

seat in the coach, had given the particulars of the murder, the mystery surrounding it, and the first pangs of Florence's grief had subsided.

The day was warm and the windows of the coach were lowered to admit the balmy air. Now and then Florence looked sadly out at the rugged hills, but there was nothing in their grandeur to her now.

The eyes of Paul Moore, the young man from the East, were ever fixed with surprise and admiration on the never-ceasing wonders that were constantly unfolding as they advanced up the pass; but in deference to the feelings of the maiden, his enthusiasm was not permitted to find expression in words.

In this manner the journey was continued mile after mile—hour after hour, and it seemed to afford a feeling of relief to the passengers when Tac Barnes finally informed them that it was not over ten or twelve miles to Red Ruin.

But he had scarcely imparted this cheerful information when the stage came to a sudden halt, and passengers heard a voice cry out:

"Don't tempt to budge a peg, or you're a dead ribboneer!"

"We're held up by road-agents, by heavens!" exclaimed Tac Barnes, with a nervous start.

A cry of terror escaped Florence Walworth's lips as she shrunk back into the corner of the coach.

Tac Barnes leaned forward and gazed out of the window.

"May I be eternally blowed!" he growled, with a look of evident disgust.

"What is it, Barnes?" Hines asked.

"Look for yourself," and Barnes settled back in his seat.

Hines looked out. A little to the left, and in front of the team, stood the tall, gaunt figure of an old man clad in rags, his long arms extended straight toward the driver. He looked for all the world like a weather-beaten scare-crow, and, as Hines dropped back into his seat, he said:

"What is it, anyhow?"

"Old Soaker, a whisky bum and vagrant, who was kicked out of Red Ruin yesterday," Barnes answered.

"He may shoot for all that," declared Paul Moore, "for he's got the driver covered now, with a pair of pistols."

Barnes burst into a derisive laugh.

"Look close, and see if he has," he commanded.

The young man again looked out, and, to his mortification, saw that the old vagrant was pointing his long, bony index fingers at the driver instead of pistols.

So often had Old Hi Graves been held up by knights of the road that he had learned to promptly obey the command to halt. Any disregard of this was sure to be followed by a shot which seldom failed to bring down a horse, if not the driver himself. But, it required only a glance for him to determine the character of the man now before him, and to see that he was covered by a pair of dirty fingers instead of steel tubes.

"You cussed ole rip!" burst from Graves's lips: "what do you mean by sich work? Do you know you'll git the stuffin' shot out of you, fu'st thing you know? Who are you? and what do you want?"

"I'm Colonel Sol Soaker, and I want a ride," was the old vagrant's reply, and, striding forward, he landed in the boot by the side of Graves before the latter could interpose an objection.

At first the driver was disposed to throw the old bum out, but he quickly changed his mind and drove on, saying as he did so:

"Old man, you've got abundance of cheek, but ar'n't much of a success as a road-agent."

"Guess not," was the reply, a drunken smile passing over the bummer's face; "Ole Colonel Soaker—them's me—has never been much o' a success 'cept drinkin' wines and campaign. But, if my fingers'd been pistols 'stead o' fingers, I expect I'd shot a mule or two, anyhow."

"Colonel, I see liquor's been your ruination," observed Graves, highly amused with his companion.

"Yes; 'n' I've been the ruination o' lots o' liquor. Some consolation in that," was the complacent response.

"Where did you come from, colonel?"

"Red Ruination. War up thar nearly a week. The folks give me a bottle o' liquor to leave, and promise of a neck-tie if I come back. But the liquor's all leaked away, and I'm goin' back fur more. Durned nice folks to Red Ruin. Had a big murder there a few nights ago—thousand dollars reward for the murderer. I'm on

the lay for that thousand. If Colonel Soaker—them's me—gits hands on the 'sassin he'll rake him from taw. I'm a bad man—hic—driver, from 'way over yan!"

It was quite clear to the driver's mind that Sol Soaker was still under the influence of his last drink, but, as he was good-natured and inoffensive, Graves concluded to let him ride to camp.

Twenty minutes later the coach was rolling along through a clump of timber whose foliage was so dense on one side as to almost exclude the light of day, when, suddenly, a man with a mask over his face, sprung from concealment, and, seizing the lead mules by the bits, jerked them back almost upon their haunches, at the same time commanding:

"Halt!"

To Hi Graves there was no uncertain sound in that voice, and he promptly drew up; but, as he did so, a pistol rung out and the faithful old driver of twenty years tumbled from the boot to the ground, a corpse.

Old Soaker made an effort to catch the falling body, but in doing so lost his balance and toppled to the ground.

The passengers were filled with terror; but Paul Moore was the first to recover his senses, and drawing his revolver proposed that they defend themselves against the robbers.

Throwing open the door he sprung out, pistol in hand; but his feet had scarcely touched the ground when he fell dead, pierced by half a dozen bullets.

The door of the coach was then opened on the side next to the strip of timber, and revolvers were thrust into the face of Hines and Barnes by masked men.

"Passengers will all get out," said the leader of the outlaws.

The two men quietly and quickly obeyed.

"I hope you will not disturb the lady," remarked Major Hines, as he stepped out and threw up his hands.

"We assure you we will not harm her," replied the outlaw, "but she will have to oblige us by getting out of the coach until we can search the vehicle for hidden treasure; and, if she has any money or jewelry of value, she can, in the mean time, deposit it with our cashier."

Trembling with terror, Florence Walworth was assisted from the coach on the timber side by one of the outlaws.

Six of the masked villains were now in sight. One of these gave attention to Old Soaker, who stood trembling with terror, his long arms raised heavenward like twin masts. When ordered to deliver up his weapons and valuables he thrust his hand into his bosom and drew forth an empty whisky-bottle which, with a laugh, the robber declined to accept. Not fully satisfied, however, the outlaw fumbled around among the bummer's ragged garments to make sure he had no weapons concealed. Finding none, he said:

"Old man, go down there and help hold them mules; and if you attempt to run you'll git it in the back. We mean business."

"Colonel" Soaker hastened to comply with the brigand's order. He took the lead mules by the bits, relieving the man who had first stopped them.

In the mean time, Hines, Barnes and Florence were led around to the opposite side of the dense bushes where it was lighter, and there were relieved of their valuables.

They were not gone over three minutes at most, when the men, Hines and Barnes, returned to the coach, supporting the half-drooping form of the girl between them.

Every robber had now disappeared.

Assisting the girl into the coach, the men examined the bodies of Graves and Moore. Both were quite dead, and the passengers concluded to let them lay where they fell, hurry on to Red Ruin and have the bodies sent for.

But now arose a new difficulty. Who would drive the coach into camp? Neither of the two had ever held the reins over more than two horses in their lives.

Finally they hit upon an expedient: They would hire Old Soaker to ride the near lead mule, while one of them would mount the coach and hold the reins.

For a pledge of all the whisky he could drink, Soaker agreed to ride the mule into camp; so, mounting the animal, the old camp exile gave the signal to start, and away they dashed, at a dead run, from the fatal spot, which run continued for nearly a mile before the old bummer could get himself balanced so as to control the lead team.

An hour before sunset the coach rolled into Red Ruin, and, as it had been expected all that

afternoon, half the camp were assembled in front of the hotel to get a look at Florence Walworth, who was also expected to arrive that afternoon.

But never were men more astounded than were those miners when the stage drove up with a stranger in the boot, and the old bummer, Sol Soaker, astride one of the lead mules.

With an air of importance the bummer slid from the back of the long-eared steed, doffed his cap with mock politeness, and bowing to the astonished crowd, exclaimed:

"Gentl'm'n, the colonel's arriv' back ag'in—glad to seee you all once more. Thought I'd got rid o' your ole camp, but I ain't, though, by a durned sight—bottle too little—false measure, and road-agents playin' roots with things 'long the gulch."

From the lips of Tac Barnes and the stranger, Major Hines, the miners heard the story of the attack by road-raiders, and the death of the driver and one passenger.

At once all became excitement in the camp, and fifty men announced their readiness to go in pursuit of the outlaws; but Mayor Vaughn, who kept cool under all circumstances, dissuaded them from any such movement, for, long ere that, the outlaws were safe in the fastnesses of the hills, where it would be folly to attempt to follow them.

Florence Walworth was taken to her father's cabin, which had been put in order for her, and where the good wives of two of the miners were waiting to receive and comfort her.

Men were sent out to bring in the bodies of Graves and young Moore.

And once more night settled down over Red Ruin.

CHAPTER III.

A STARTLING SURPRISE.

MAJOR HINES, who came in on the stage with Florence Walworth, put up at the hotel, informing the landlord that he had money to pay his bill, having very cleverly succeeded in outwitting the road-agents that day, and had saved, not only three or four hundred dollars, but his gold watch, also, out of the wreck.

After supper, the major went with a few others over to Baldy Krone's saloon, The Magnet, and ordered liquor for the crowd.

Not to be outdone in liberality by the stranger, each of the miners called the drinks, and by the time all had treated, the major's tongue began to limber up, and he became clamorous for a game of poker.

It now was apparent to some that the man's true character was cropping out—that he was a professional gambler, and they had no desire to try conclusions with him at the tables.

Finally, however, a man came in who was willing to accommodate him with a game. This was the miner, "Purple Nose" Jack, a notorious gambler, who hitherto had been uniformly successful with the pasteboards.

Seating himself at a table, Major Hines said: "My friend, is this to be a fight to the finish? I've got a few hundred I tricked the road-agents out of to-day, and you can have it if—well, what is it?"

"Just suit yourself, major," blandly responded Jack, seating himself opposite the stranger.

"Well, I mean to have fair play, anyhow," observed Hines, drawing a pistol and holding it up so that all could see it, then replacing it in his pocket.

"You're all business I see," remarked Old Jack, with a slight touch of sarcasm in his voice.

In the mean time, Old Sol Soaker had put in his appearance just in time to get a glimpse of Hines's pistol, when he blurted out just what was in the minds of several others:

"Guess ye tricked the road-agents outen a pistol, too, didn't ye, maj'r, eh?"

"I borrowed this at the hotel," answered Hines; but, calling to Baldy Krone, he said: "Proprietor, give that bummer a pint of poisoned whisky at my expense, then kick him out of the shop."

A few applauded this reckless order, but it impressed others more strongly than ever that the man was not only a sport but a desperado.

The game finally began, and no little excitement was manifested as to the result. Everybody who could get within sight gathered around the players.

Old Soaker ran a "side-show" over in the corner of the house to entertain the "overflow," and while a deathlike stillness reigned around the gamblers, roars of laughter burst out, ever and anon, from the "colonel's" corner.

"Purple Nose" Jack seemed to be in his usual luck, for the cards ran in his favor from

the very start, and it was but a short time until every dollar the road-agents had left the major had changed to his side of the table.

As a last chance, Hines pulled out his gold watch, saying as he laid it on the table:

"My friend, I'm going to chance that to change my luck. It escaped the road-agents' fingers, and we'll see if it slips into those of any other."

Some question as to the value of the watch was raised, and while this was being discussed, and the watch examined, Old Soaker edged his way through the crowd to the table, piping out in a shrill tone:

"Say, pard, I believe that's a snide watch—two for a V."

"Any man of sense can examine it," snapped Hines, nervous from his recent losses.

"Them's me!" averred Soaker, reaching over and taking up the chronometer in his dirty hand.

"You old fool!" snarled the gambler, "you don't know a watch from a turnip!"

Soaker deliberately opened the timepiece and looked at the works inside.

"Stars!" he exclaimed, "don't she flicker beautiful! Ain't she a hummer? Hear her buzz! See her glitter! She's a full jewel with double pistons and triple duadlums."

"Put down that watch at once, you dirty vagrant!" roared Hines, his eyes snapping fire.

"Guess I will—into my pocket! It's the very identical 'ticker' I've been lookin' for, pard," responded the bummer, dropping the watch into his pocket.

"You thief!" exclaimed the burly major, his red face changing to a black purple, while his hand dropped to the pistol he had displayed a few minutes before; "if you don't give up that watch at once I'll put a hole through your whisky soaked carcass!"

"D'yo mean it, major?" asked Old Sol, as if doubting the earnestness of the man's threat.

"If you knew who you were trifling with," retorted the gambler, "you'd drop that watch as if it were a scorpion."

"Say, major!" sharply exclaimed the ragged bummer, at the same time thrusting the muzzle of a derringer into the gambler's face, "I know you! You're Socorro Dan, the Desert Vulture, robber, outlaw and murderer, and you're my prisoner! Hands up, Socorro, or, by the horn o' Joshua! whang she goes! I'm Kit Bandy, the Mountain Detective!"

CHAPTER IV.

A TERRIBLE TRAGEDY.

NEVER were men more astounded than the miners of Red Ruin were by the revelation of Old Sol Soaker, the bummer, and for several long moments a dead hush reigned for once in The Magnet Saloon.

That Old Soaker was Kit Bandy in disguise would never have been accepted as true, but for the sudden transformation in the whole man.

Nor were the miners any more astounded than was the outlaw, Socorro Dan, himself. Desperado that the Vulture of the Desert was, he seemed fairly paralyzed by the surprise so suddenly sprung upon him. Full well he knew the reputation of the Mountain Detective, and quickly realized that he was in the toils—unmasked—run down.

Reluctantly the villain raised his hands above his head to avert a sudden death, involuntarily shrinking from the fierce glare of the old detective's eyes.

A soft whistle in the room and the quick step of feet broke the silence.

Then the lithe figure of a little, old, smooth-faced man, who had been registered at the hotel several days under the name of Obidah Green, edged through the crowd to the rear of the outlaw, and, before any one had time to think, he slipped a pair of handcuffs on the desperado's upheld wrists.

"Well done, Ichabod!" said Kit Bandy, removing his pistol from the outlaw's face; "well done, Mr. Flea! We've garnered in the boss robber and murderer o' the day, the mighty Desert Vulture, the valorious Socorro Dan, the gallant Major Hines, who, I have no doubt, was in cahoots with the varmints that attacked the coach to-day."

The click of a revolver was heard in the room as the old detective finished speaking, and, straightening up, he glanced quickly over the crowd, towering a head above those around him. As he did so, a revolver rung out, a cry escaped his lips, and, staggering forward, he fell across the gambling-table, shot down by some unknown!

A cry of rage escaped the lips of the miners, and knives and pistols were quickly drawn to avenge the assassination.

In the wild confusion and excitement the big lamp, suspended from the ceiling, was shattered by a blow and the room was plunged in darkness.

But this lasted for only a moment. The burning wick of the lamp falling in the pool of spilled kerosene ignited the inflammable oil, and a broad, angry flame leaped into the air almost instantly and spread out overhead along the ceiling of dry pine boards.

The crowd of excited men made a rush for the door, struggling and crowding, and cursing as if bereft of reason; and, by the time the last man had escaped, the whole interior of the saloon was a mass of flame, the dry pine boards and timbers burning like paper.

Ichabod Flea had been swept from the room by the rush of miners, who forgot entirely the body of the old detective. But as soon as the way was clear the brave little detective resolved to rescue the body of his friend from the flames, and bounded back into the burning saloon. But, as he crossed the threshold, a billow of hissing flame struck him in the face and he reeled back into the open air, burned, scorched and half-suffocated.

During the excitement the manacled outlaw made good his escape from both the saloon and the camp.

The cry of "Fire!" brought the entire camp to The Magnet; but no effort was made to subdue the flames, and by desperate work only were they prevented from spreading to other buildings.

In a few minutes' time The Magnet was in ashes, to the deep regret of the many, and the silent joy of a few.

Mayor Vaughn was sorely distressed over the death of Kit Bandy and the escape of Socorro Dan. He had taken an official pride in Red Ruin. For months the camp had been as peaceful and quiet as an Eastern village, and he attributed it to his good government; but now, all at once, it had become the scene of startling sensations.

A careful search was made for the handcuffed outlaw, but he was not to be found. He had been helped away, for there was no doubt in the mind of any one but that the man who shot Bandy, and broke the lamp, was a friend of the Desert Vulture—one of his gang.

After the excitement had somewhat subsided, the mayor called on Miss Walworth. In fact, the maiden had sent for him, for, as Harry Vaughn was a lawyer by profession, and the only one in camp, she desired some legal advice as to her father's interest in the Jolly Jane.

The young mayor was delighted with his visit at the Walworth cabin, for, despite her great sorrow, Florence was a most beautiful and charming young woman, in both form and feature.

After he had answered all questions in relation to her father's interest in the Jolly Jane, and had advised her as to the legal steps to establish her heirship to the property, the subject of the stage-robbery was brought up.

It had been settled in Vaughn's mind that Major Hines, alias Socorro Dan, was in league with the road-agents; but he was not aware, until he returned, that Tac Barnes had gone to meet her with the news of her father's death. He did know, however, that Little Fury had been sent to Leadville to act as her escort, but, of the boy, not a word had been heard since his departure. Nor did Miss Florence know aught of him. He never came to Leadville, she said, nor did she hear his name mentioned.

There was some mystery about the boy's whereabouts, and the mayor was afraid that something had happened to him.

Another thing that troubled him was the continued absence of Tom Rattler, who left camp the morning after Little Fury had started on his mission, and had not been heard of since.

But, in the presence of the fair Florence, the mayor finally forgot the things that troubled his mind, and, ere he was scarcely aware of the fact, he had passed several hours in her company.

Finally he bade her good-night and returned to his office, struck a light, and seating himself, gazed around at the bare walls. The place seemed so dreary and lonely! Something was missing. He had never felt so before, and, after some meditation, during which the fair face of Florence Walworth kept rising before his mental vision, he discovered that he was no longer a heart-free man.

Harry Vaughn was a man of five-and-thirty years, and was a handsome, dashing fellow, whose heart had proved invulnerable to the darts of Cupid. Of this, it was his wont to boast; but, at last, taken off his guard, in the

midst of Red Ruin's excitement, he fell a victim to the charms of the heiress of the Jolly Jane. And he was honest enough with himself to admit the fact, and, at length, turned to his desk to do some writing. As he did so, his eyes fell upon a slip of blue paper lying before him. He picked it up and looked it over. There was some writing in pencil on one side. He read it, and re-read it, his face growing pale and his lips twitching as if struggling to suppress a cry of inward pain. And this is what he read:

"MAYOR VAUGHN:—Keep a watch on the affairs of the Jolly Jane. The girl at Walworth's cabin, calling herself Florence Walworth, may be an impostor—will know soon. Be on guard until you hear from
ZADOC."

CHAPTER V.

LITTLE FURY MEETS TROUBLE.

IN accordance with his promise, Little Fury left Red Ruin an hour or two before daylight, and started on his mission to Leadville.

No doubt, at that very hour John Walworth lay dead in his cabin, and it is perhaps well the messenger did not hear of the murder before leaving, else this story would never have been written.

Mounted upon his pony, a fleet-footed and untiring animal, he galloped away up Roaring Gulch in the darkness that precedes dawn.

Finally it began to grow light on the mountain-tops, and by and by the lofty peaks were aflame with morning light, which gradually rolled down into the valleys and dispelled the lurking shadows and chilly breath of night.

Birds flashed in and out of the sunlight and whistled and sung gleefully as the youth ambled along the lonely pass, his hat resting jauntily on the back of his head, his brown eyes flashing with the light of a free young spirit, and his boyish face beaming with the roseate hues of health and vigor.

Far up Roaring Gulch, and near the mouth of Crow Wing Canyon, was a spring of clear, cold water bubbling out from beneath a great rock. Upon the face of that rock some one—a loitering miner, perhaps—had cut the words Bethesda Pool, and by this name was the famous spring known to those who traveled that way as was Bethesda Pool by the walls of Jerusalem known two thousand years ago.

Whoever journeyed up and down Roaring Gulch must stop there for a drink, and there Little Fury drew rein and dismounted to eat a cold lunch and slake his thirst.

Leaving his horse standing headvanced to the edge of the pool, threw off his hat and laid down upon his stomach to drink.

While the youth was still in this position the figure of a man with face masked crept from the bushes to the edge of the rock overhanging the pool and there waited with cocked revolver for the boy to rise.

But Little Fury was in no hurry. He knew the assassin was on the rock. He had discovered him there by his reflection in the crystal waters! and ere he scrambled slowly to his feet, he had slipped out his revolver, muzzle upward, and fired!

A cry of pain burst from the masked villain's lips. He tottered for a moment on the edge of the rock, lost his balance and fell at the feet of his intended victim.

"Oho! you old wolf!" exclaimed the boy, "you didn't know that I saw your ugly mug in the water! I reckon you're one of Captain Trojan's band of outlaws that's been warning me to leave Red Ruin."

A groan from the prostrate man's lips told that he was not dead; so, stooping, Little Fury removed the mask from the outlaw's face, disclosing a gash on the side of the head that his bullet had cut.

The outlaw gazed up into the boy's face in a dazed sort of a way.

"Well, I didn't kill you, after all, did I?" the boy said, as he looked upon the man with knitted brows; "and I'm in a study whether to finish the job or let you go. I know you meant to shoot me, you big brute!"

A moan was all the answer.

"I guess I'll let you go," the boy finally decided, "and trust to your master, Old Satan, taking you in."

Walking to his pony the boy placed one foot in the stirrup and was in the act of leaping into his saddle when a revolver was fired almost in the face of his broncho, causing the animal to start back, throwing his master to the ground.

Then followed a rush of feet, and a second masked man bounded from behind a rock and seized the boy around the middle as he rose to his feet.

Little Fury endeavored to draw his revolver,

but of this he was promptly relieved by another villain who appeared from the bushes, also.

The outlaw who had seized the boy in his arms supposed he had the youth at his mercy, but, in this he was mistaken. Like an eel the Young Whirlwind wriggled out of the fellow's strong arms, turned, and dealt him a resounding whack on the nose that brought the blood.

With furious oaths the two villains closed in again upon him. And the man whose life Frank had spared, recovering his senses, joined in the struggle with the boy, whose capture alive they seemed determined upon.

The trio of villains grasped the lad by the arms—by the legs, or wherever they could lay a hand upon him, but now fully aroused, the youth lashed himself about like a young panther—slipping from their grasp, and striking right and left terrific blows.

One moment they were up on their feet, the next down, rolling over and over upon the ground.

A veritable whirlwind indeed did those three burly outlaws find the wiry, supple youth, for the longer the struggle lasted the more desperate he seemed to grow.

"Stay with the slippery young devil, Achilles!" panted the wounded outlaw; "we'll wear him out yet! Give him one in the ribs, Hector, and yank some o' the breath out o' the snaky young cuss!"

The leader's words had hardly passed his lips when the heel of the Young Whirlwind came in contact with his stomach, doubling him up on the ground; the villain "Achilles" received a terrific slap in the face that, for a moment, blinded him, while "Hector" was thrown heavily forward upon his face by Little Fury darting between his legs and tripping him up.

"Shoot the young devil!" yelled "Achilles;" "Shoot him, 'Hector,' and be done with him!" "Hector" would gladly have done so, but by the time he could recover his feet and draw his revolver, the boy was thirty paces away.

His pony, having run off during the struggle, Little Fury was compelled to trust to his legs, and getting out of the outlaws' clutches he leaped upon the rocks below the pool and began climbing the mountain-side.

The outlaws firing several shots, started in pursuit. When he saw them coming he uttered a laugh of defiance, and, with a wave of the hand, called them on.

His expressions of defiance were answered by a sound that, for a moment, fairly stunned him. It was an Indian war-whoop that seemed to burst suddenly out of the earth below him!

Stopping, he looked back, and to his surprise and horror he saw, at least, three-score of Ute savages, hideous in war-paint, swarming up the hill in pursuit of him, the three outlaws cheering them on.

Flashing a look of fierce disdain at the yelling horde, the young mountaineer continued his flight up the mountain, gradually bearing to the left.

The acclivity was steep and almost barren of vegetation. Only a few stunted pines, and now and then a bunch of sage-brush were to be seen, but everywhere, like great welts and blisters, ridges and points of rocks harassed the face of the heights.

Little Fury was never for a moment out of sight of his pursuers. There was no chance to elude them. This he knew, but, confident of his own power of endurance, he resolved to lead them to the very summit of the range if they chose to follow him so far.

The boy found no difficulty in keeping out of range of their fire-arms. He even found time to set a loose stone rolling down-hill now and then, and this, in its rapid descent, would start others. In eluding these flying missiles the advance of the red-skins was somewhat retarded.

Thus the pursuit had continued for more than an hour, when it was brought to a sudden and tragic termination.

Little Fury had reached a bench on the acclivity some three or four feet high. Along the top of this bench, resting against a fringe of sage-brush, was a bulging heap of dirt and stone of nearly an acre in extent which seemed ready to shoot down the acclivity at the least disturbance.

This, however, the boy did not know and reaching up, he seized a bunch of the sage-brush and endeavored to draw himself up. The bush, already bending under the pressure of the "sleeping" landslide, snapped off and the youth fell back. Springing up, he caught hold of another bush, when, to his horror, he heard a grinding sound above him and saw the earth in front moving toward him!

Before he could realize his danger he was

crowded back off the rock, and the next moment an avalanche of dirt and stone swept over him and went crashing down the mountain, gathering force as it went, catching up several red-skins and grinding them to shreds, and finally landed in the canyon with a crash that made the very mountain tremble.

CHAPTER VI.

IN A CHAMBER OF HORRORS.

For several minutes the outlaws and the savages who had escaped death stood appalled by the calamity that the Young Whirlwind seemed to have hurled upon them. Darkness, black almost as night, fell around them as the dust and dirt from the landslide filled the air; and a panic would have ensued among the red-skins but for the presence of mind of the three desperate outlaws.

Recovering from the shock the villains gave a yell of defiance and started up the hill in pursuit, the Utes rallying and following.

They soon reached the starting-point of the landslide, but there was no sign of the fugitive. Satisfied that he had been caught in the avalanche, they retraced their steps to the valley to look for his body among the debris.

Little Fury, however, lay buried alive at the very starting-point of the slide. When crowded back off the bench, he flung himself at the base of the rock which was slightly projecting, and the mighty mass shot over him. But the angle of the bench was filled level full with dirt and stone, and he found himself buried, he knew not how deep.

Egyptian darkness was round and about him, and the narrow space in which he lay crowded was filled almost to suffocation with fine dust. In fact, for awhile it seemed as if he must smother, but, the dust settling, he breathed freer and hope once more sprung up in his breast.

He could hear nothing of his enemies, but decided to allow sufficient time for them to depart before venturing to the outer world. While thus waiting he pushed his hands beyond his head and found more space there, so he dragged himself into it.

Again he felt around him. The passage seemed to continue, and by following it he now hoped to reach the open air. He knew it could not go beyond the track of the landslide, and with no little difficulty he crawled and "wormed" along until it seemed he must have gone a full half-mile.

He thought it strange, indeed, that he could never reach the end of the tunnel. He felt of the walls and to his utmost surprise found they were solid rock! Then he discovered why there was no end to the passage: he had crept into a tunnel leading back into the hill—perhaps to the lair of some wild beast!

The youth at once began to retrace his steps by backing down the passage in hopes of reaching the point where he had turned into the hill. To his surprise he suddenly found himself in a place he knew he had not been in before. It was a roomy chamber where he could sit upright and the walls were beyond his reach!

A grim smile passed over the boy's face, for he now realized his situation—that he was lost in a network of subterranean passages.

After resting awhile he moved on. He soon found himself in a passage so narrow that with difficulty he squeezed through. It zigzagged first to the right and then the left, but finally landed him in a spacious room that was pervaded with a strange, sickish, musty odor.

It now occurred to Frank that he had a safe of matches in his pocket, and withdrawing one, he lit it. As the flame grew bright it lighted up the dismal hole and revealed to his gaze a human skeleton lying in the center of the place!

A shudder convulsed his frame at sight of the grinning, repulsive object, and he felt relieved when the light went out. But, the dreadful thought rushed through his mind, in an instant, that he was not the first person who had been lost in those delusive passages.

Leaving that death-chamber he crawled away, resolved to find his way out. For an hour or two—it seemed twice that long to him—he dragged along the gloomy tunnels that wound and twisted among the rocks, and finally entered what he found to be another large room. He lighted another match, when, horror of horrors! there once again before him lay a grinning skeleton!

A feeling akin to despair entered his breast; but he quickly banished it, plucked up his courage and renewed his determination to find his way out of those chambers of death. He was not certain that the skeleton before him was not the same one found before, nor was there any way to determine the fact. But, marking the

place so as to be able to recognize it should he wander back, he moved on.

Finally he began to feel tired and drowsy, and realizing the necessity of a clear mind and vigorous strength, he laid down in the passage and went to sleep.

When he awoke he felt refreshed, and at once resumed his tramp through the dark and silent hall. He traveled what seemed miles, but always only to find himself back in that chamber of horrors with the skeleton!

This was enough to have discouraged the strongest heart, and a less plucky spirit would have yielded to despair, as was doubtless the case with the spirit that once animated the now fleshless frame before him. But not so with Little Fury. He was determined to escape or, at least, keep on trying until forced to succumb to hunger and thirst.

How long he had been in the cavern he knew not, but it seemed a week. Three times he laid down and slept. Finally he began to feel the pangs of hunger, and this was followed by thirst. Still he kept moving, and when, for the fourth time, he wandered back to that death-chamber, he began to feel discouraged.

His hands and knees were sore from coming in contact with the rocky floor. His strength was failing for want of food, and his whole body was becoming hot and feverish.

His mind, however, remained perfectly clear, and upon this the youth still based strong hopes.

Slowly he continued his wanderings. His thirst became more aggravating.

For the fourth time he laid down to rest, and then, for the first time he heard, or imagined he did, a sound—the sound of dripping water. He sprang up and listened. He heard nothing. After all it was only a delusion of that horrible place—a delusion that rendered keener his pangs of thirst.

Almost in total despair the boy laid down again, when he heard that sound repeated. He listened with his ear to the floor. He heard the steady drip, drip of water without doubt. It was a blessed sound, and he was almost afraid to stir lest it should cease.

In a delirium of hopeful excitement he lay prone upon the ground, listening like the enchanted mariner to the siren's song. To locate the spot, or even determine the direction whence the sound came, he found was a difficult thing to do.

He finally concluded, however, it came from down the passage before him, and he crept forward, counting his steps as he advanced.

After going ten paces he stopped and listened. Blessed sound! he could now hear it distinctly. And hark! another sound greeted his ears! It was the sound of human voices!

At last his hour of deliverance from the Chamber of Delusion had come!

He forgot his hunger, his thirst, his pain. He stood up on his knees and was in the very act of uttering a shout when his better judgment prevailed, and his lips remained closed.

The voices he heard might be those of enemies.

A light suddenly shone out before him. It was a dim, artificial flame—not that of day.

Those voices he could now hear distinctly. He crept along the passage toward the light and soon discovered that the tunnel opened into a large cavern.

Venturing still closer, the boy cautiously peered into the lighted chamber, then drew back, thankful that he had not uttered the shout which that first impulse of joy had prompted. For in the cavern he saw no less than six men, among whom were the three villains that had attacked him at Bethesda Pool!

Nor was that all he discovered. At one side sat a female form, her head bowed upon her hand, her slender form shivering as ever and anon a low sob escaped her lips!

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE DEN.

It had been known for some months that a band of outlaws calling themselves Trojans infested the hills lying between Leadville and Red Ruin.

That he had at last found their stronghold Little Fury had not a doubt.

When the youth looked in upon them they were eating a lunch, at the same time carrying on a discussion in which there seemed to be some difference of opinion.

But, who could the woman be? This the young scout asked himself over and over. He was satisfied she was there against her own will, for she appeared to be weeping and in great distress.

Listening, the boy heard the men address each other by such names as Hector, Achilles, Ajax, and other names of ancient Greek and Trojan warriors, and this fact convinced him that he had really discovered the stronghold of Bill Trojan's band of outlaws.

After keeping up a sort of desultory conversation for an hour, at least, Little Fury heard one of the freebooters ask:

"Captain Trojan, hadn't we better be movin'? It's as dark now as it will be."

"Don't worry your mind, Hector," was the reply; "the world wasn't made in a day, and, besides, we've nothin' to fear since that young imp, Little Fury, got completely wiped out by the land-slide."

"Oh-ho!" exclaimed the young scout to himself, "so I'm really and completely wiped out, am I? Well, I guess not! I'm simply *blotted* out for a day or two, and when I get out of this snarl I'll proceed to start another land-slide, and if I—"

Here the youth's reflections were ended in order to catch the following from the lips of one of the outlaws:

"Captain, it's all o' ten miles to Black Dog's camp. The mayor will be there waitin' us, and he wants to get over the range with his *goods*, soon as possible. You see, the stage 'll git into Red Ruin before night and report an attack by road-agents, and then the whole camp 'll come b'lin' into these hills—"

"Whyfore?" interrupted the captain; "it's no unusual thing to rob a stage nowadays. To be sure the accidental killin' o' the driver and one passenger war a little out o' the usual order, but, not enough so to disturb a prosperous mining-camp. The little lady passenger, of course, we didn't disturb to any great extent."

A low, chuckling laugh followed the outlaw's concluding remark.

From their talk Little Fury had learned one thing: the villains had just come in from an attack on the stage-coach. They had killed the driver and one passenger; but the "little lady passenger" they had not disturbed.

"Who could that 'little lady passenger' have been?" the boy asked himself. "Was it Florence Walworth? If so, then he had been imprisoned in that cavern nearly *three days*! or else she arrived ahead of time."

"The wu'st feature o' this hull darned b'isness," the boy heard one of the robbers say, "is the death o' 'Eneas' in that landslide. If 'Queenie' gits wind o' his death, she'll kick the hull business over 'thout regard to consequences."

"But she mus'n't hear o' it," replied another; "least not till the sale o' the property's made good."

"I've been afeard all the time," the first speaker said, "bout the gal. She war squ'amish 'bout goin' into the scheme, and if she finds out one thing bein' wrong—that is, that she's been lied to, somewhat, I wouldn't give a nick for 'Ajax's' chance to escape stretchin' hemp."

Who Queenie was, and the "scheme" to which the outlaw referred, Little Fury could not find out, nor even imagine.

Finally the outlaws made ready to leave the cavern, or, all of them but one, who appeared to be indisposed. To him Captain Trojan was heard to say, as the party arose to leave:

"Good-night, Diomed; sorry you ar'n't able to go along, but take care of yourself till we git back."

Then the five departed, taking the weeping prisoner with them.

Little Fury now ventured to make a careful survey of the big cavern. The man left behind he recognized as the villain he had wounded at Bethesda Pool. His head was bound up in clothes, and his face looked pale and haggard.

The cavern was lighted with a miner's lamp. At three or four different places water was dropping from the ceiling into vessels on the floor, and it was by this means, no doubt, that the outlaws obtained their water supply.

The boy saw "Diomed" lay down on the floor and cover himself with a blanket, immediately after his friends departed. In a few minutes he was sound asleep. Little Fury could hear his heavy breathing quite distinctly.

This was the boy's time to act. Stealthily he crept out into the great chamber, rose to his feet, stretched his cramped limbs and went through other silent performances to restore the circulation of blood.

Then he advanced to one of the water-vessels, took it up and drank his fill, all the time keeping one eye, as it were, on the sleeping "Trojan."

His thirst quenched, he began looking about for something to eat. He espied a box at the further end of the cave and started to inspect it.

On the way he saw something glisten on the wall, and stopped to examine it. To his great surprise, and joy as well, he found it to be his own revolver, and by it was his knife! In a twinkling he had transferred them to his belt.

Reaching the box he found it contained bread and meat. Taking a seat on a rock he helped himself, and never did food, coarse and stale as it was, taste sweeter to a hungry mortal.

And still the wounded outlaw slept on. When he had finished eating the young scout made a further inspection of the robber den. In a niche in the wall he found no less than six revolvers of different caliber and value—all loaded.

A grim smile passed over the youngster's face as he proceeded to fill his belt and pockets with the weapons.

He grew bolder and bolder as he continued his inspection of the place, and at last, when he had made the rounds, he walked up to the sleeping outlaw and gave him a shove with his foot, saying:

"Landlord, say, wake up here, and look after your guests!"

The outlaw groaned, threw aside his covering and rising to a sitting posture, gazed around him in bewilderment, and then up into the face of the figure standing before him.

"Don't know me, do you, Diomed?" the youth asked as he leaned forward and placed a revolver at the villain's face. "I'm Little Fury, and that's a loaded revolver, and it's liable to go off, and you'd better keep cool. I'm as many as you are now, and somewhat more flush."

The outlaw growled out an oath and then quickly clasped his head between both hands as if it were bursting with pain, instead of abject fear.

"I know, Diomed, you're surprised," the boy went on, "for so am I. You're a sound sleeper, Dio.; I've been roamin' around here in your palace for an hour, eating and drinking at the expense of you rosy Greek and Trojan gods, reluctant to wake your lordship."

"Young devil!" hissed the dumfounded outlaw, "you'll pay for this most dearly!"

"I'm willin' to pay reg'lar hotel-rates, Diomed," Frank replied; "but, I'm short now, and you'll have to call on my banker in Red Ruin first time you're there. But, say, pard: can't you tell me *who* that woman is your folks took away from here awhile ago?"

The man answered with an oath:

"Never! you young varlet!"

"Then rise up, and if you have any weapons about your garments hand them over. I mean business, now."

And Little Fury spoke in a tone not to be misunderstood.

The outlaw arose to his feet and submitted to be searched. A revolver was all Frank found, and, adding it to his already large collection, he continued:

"Now Diomed, I go. I'd ought to kill you before I go, but, as I don't want the blood of such a k-yote on my hands, I'll leave you for the Vigilantes. Tal' ta! Diomed."

Taking the lamp from the wall, Little Fury started from the cavern. He had not taken twenty steps when a bullet cut past his head and the pent-up roar of a revolver rolled down the cavern.

"I'd ought to know it!" was Frank's quick reflection, as he dropped the lamp and pressed himself into a depression in the wall as a second bullet came down the passage.

Little Fury now returned the fire, and for the next minute the exchange of compliments between them was decidedly lively.

"Diomed" was the first to cease firing—whether for the want of ammunition or lack of breath was not certain; but the invincible young whirlwind was well supplied with both, and awaited patiently the renewal of the conflict on the part of the "Trojan."

But he waited in vain. Fully five minutes passed, and hearing nothing of the outlaw, he ventured to pick up the lamp and hold it at arm's-length to draw the enemy's fire should he be waiting for him. But, as no shot followed, he came to the conclusion that he had downed the villain, and at once continued his retreat from the cavern.

Soon he reached the outer world once more. He found it was night. The moon, almost in the zenith, was flooding mountain and vale with its mellow, drowsy light.

"Thank God!" the young scout exclaimed, aloud, as he realized that he was once more free, drinking in the fresh, cool air of heaven.

For a moment he stood at the mouth of the cavern, gazing around to get his bearings; then he bounded away down the mountain, and was soon lost in the shadows of Crow Wing Canyon.

CHAPTER VIII.

A PILGRIM STRANGER.

THIRTY miles up Crow Wing Canyon was located the temporary camp of the Ute chief, Black Dog, and there we would now conduct the reader.

It is night, and around a roaring camp-fire are sitting and lounging forty or fifty red-skin warriors, and some eight or ten white men. The latter are none other than the Trojan outlaws, chief among whom is the noted desperado, Socorro Dan, the Desert Vulture.

The latter had just arrived in camp, that evening. For four-and-twenty hours had he been expected. But for his absence the Indians would have been on their march through the hills and the outlaws back at their den.

The handcuffs were still on the great scoundrel's wrists, though the chain had been cut.

The place selected by Black Dog for his camp was a strong position. The pass was narrow and deep, the walls on either side rising straight in the air for a mile above and below. There was a spring hard by and an abundance of dead-wood for fuel almost choking the pass in places.

Captain Trojan and his gang had been in the camp of Black Dog since the night before. They had come there, bringing with them a young captive girl whose beauty set the covetous chief beside himself with passionate admiration.

The poor girl was well-nigh exhausted when the camp was reached, but she was at once provided with a comfortable couch placed in a little grotto-like cave in the side of the canyon. To guard against intrusion, as well as to prevent escape, a stone wall four feet high had been laid up across the mouth of this grotto.

The arrival of Socorro Dan shortly after night-fall was hailed with a feeling of relief by Captain Trojan and his men.

"We were a little uneasy 'bout you, Dan!" the outlaw chief said, "was afeard you'd got into trouble."

"And so I did. See these bracelets?"

And the Desert Vulture held up his manacled wrist so that all could see the irons.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed Trojan; "what's that mean?"

The outlaw related his encounter with Kit Bandy in the saloon at Red Ruin, and his narrow escape through the timely help of a friend, who shot Bandy, set the building on fire, and created a panic, during which he got away into the hills where he had spent just twenty hours in filing the links of his manacle on the edge of a sharp stone.

The red-faced desperado was congratulated on his good luck in being the first man to outwit the notorious Kit Bandy, the news of whose death and cremation afforded the band of cut-throats no little joy and satisfaction.

After the outlaw had finished the story of his adventures at Red Ruin, Captain Trojan said:

"Well, Dan'l, we've delivered your *goods* in good order. She's over yander in that grotto. She needs rest and sleep. She has eaten but little, and seems determined to starve her sweet self to death."

"I'll go over there after awhile and cheer her up," announced the red-faced wretch, with a grin. "I must first have something to eat, myself, for I'm twenty-four hours off feed. But, men, how's the camp? Is it well-guarded?"

"It will be," answered Black Dog.

And it was. To guard against the possibility of surprise two bonfires had been lighted in the defile, one above and one below the main camp, and three warriors were detailed to each to keep them burning through the night. As these fires lighted every foot of the pass between the great walls, a rabbit could not pass unobserved.

Socorro Dan was furnished the best food the camp afforded, and after he had satisfied his hunger, he announced his intention of calling on the captive in the grotto. But before he had carried this intention into execution, the whole camp was aroused by a strange sound coming from up the canyon.

At first it was not very distinct, but, as it grew louder and louder—nearer and nearer, the outlaws discovered it was some one coming down the canyon, singing in a loud, stentorian voice that woke the sleeping echoes for miles and miles.

"Well, by the gods! what's 'bout to strike us?" exclaimed Captain Trojan, with a puzzled look.

A smile passed over the face of Socorro Dan, as he replied:

"Sounds like a Salvation Army!"

"It does, don't it? Reckon they're comin' to proselyte us."

"Look out they don't prosecute us, cap'n," chipped in an outlaw.

"They? Why, there's only one doin' that singin'."

"Well, he's got a voice like Gabriel's trumpet," declared Trojan. "Listen! he's singin' 'On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand,' sure's purgatory. He's some ole religious crank, I'll bet!"

"Strange, cap'n," remarked the Desert Vulture, with intended sarcasm, "that you know he's singin' a religious hymn."

"Oh! I used to hear Chaplain Pelters sing it often when I boarded at Joliet. The old man'd line it out and start her, and then how his striped congregation would make things hum!"

"Then the fellow comin' may be an old cell-mate of yours," suggested the Vulture; "but hear him now! Don't he roll it off majestically? Isn't he a lark?"

Suddenly the singing ceased. The singer must have come in contact with the guards at the upper watch-fire.

But the entire camp was now on foot, and all eyes were turned up at the canyon, eager to get a glimpse of the nocturnal wanderer, at the same time on the alert for a possible hostile surprise.

And their curiosity was soon gratified by sight of the singer, who was marched into camp by the red-skin guards, and whose odd and striking appearance completely astonished the outlaws, while Black Dog, with a look of recognition upon his face, exclaimed:

"Loud Sing! Long Talk! Big Pray! *waugh!*"

CHAPTER IX.

"SALVATION SAM."

CAPTAIN TROJAN and his confederates saw at once that the singing stranger was known to the Indians, for they greeted him in a friendly way.

To the outlaws, however, he was a total stranger, and at the same time, the most remarkable-looking fellow they had ever chanced to meet anywhere.

He was a man not less than sixty years of age, and standing at least six feet in his moccasins. His limbs were long and angular, his hands and feet large. His face had been recently and cleanly shaved, revealing a cast of features upon which the ravages of time had wrought severely. There was a peculiar, vacant stare in his little gray eyes which at first sight led Socorro Dan to suspect a lack of mental balance.

But the oddest of all was the man's dress—a full suit of threadbare, shiny and somewhat soiled broadcloth, and a tall silk hat that looked as though it had been through a political campaign. His coat was of the "swallow-tail" pattern, the long-pointed tail reaching well down toward his heels. His vest was buttoned to his long, scrawny neck, which was encircled by a black satin stock.

This unique stranger strode into camp with the air of one who knew exactly what he was doing. While maintaining a certain dignity and choice of expression, there was nothing about his looks or speech that evinced the least uneasiness or mistrust of the character of that camp. He appeared like one who felt he was among friends, and had no need of standing upon ceremony.

Black Dog's outburst of "Big Pray," "Loud Sing," and "Long Talk," was repeated by most of the red-skins, and in response the stranger, with a bow and sweeping wave of the hand, said:

"Good-evening, my red friends and white. I beg pardon for this intrusion, but I was journeyin' this way and run right into you. How are you, anyhow, Black Dog?"

"Heap well," replied the chief; "but why Loud Sing here?"

"I was on my way to Red Ruin to preach," the old stranger answered; "I have heard the place was a sinful camp."

"Then you're a sort of a circuit preacher, eh?" exclaimed Captain Trojan, approaching the man.

"Well, yes," the old man replied, reflectively; "that is, I am a preacher of the Salvation Army. My name is Samuel Plenty. Where best and longest known they call me Salvation Sam. I have been preaching among the Indians and mining-camps of the far West two years. I have spent many weeks in the camp of this great and good chief, Black Dog."

"Loud Pray—Long Talk—Big Music—make hills rattle," added Black Dog, endeavoring to return the compliment Salvation Sam had just paid him.

"I sing when I grow weary, and it refreshes me," Sam commented; "there's nothing like

music to cheer the mind, purify the soul and lighten the footsteps."

"Real, downright fear in case a grizzly war after a feller, I think, would make the footsteps lighter than music," declared Hector, the outlaw; and his friends greeted his remark with a laugh.

"Salvation Sam," said Captain Trojan, calling up Socorro Dan by a motion of his hand, "I want to introduce my friend, Bracelet Dick."

"Bracelet Dick!" repeated the Salvationist, shaking hands with the Vulture; "rather a peculiar name."

"Do you see them, Samuel?" queried Socorro Dan, holding up to the old man's view his manacled wrists; "them's what give me my name. I'm proud of them, for they cost Old Kit Bandy his miserable, pestiferous life."

"Ah! my friend Dick," exclaimed the old man, with a shake of the head, "I'm afraid you've been a little wild in your day, and perchance are sowing some wild oats yet!"

"Well, to tell the truth, Samuel, a little saving grace wouldn't do me any harm," confessed the desperado, tipping Captain Trojan the wink; "and perhaps you won't object to givin' me a trial sample of your Gospel goods."

"Yes," put in the facetious Hector, "give us a song, and a short-cut sermon in the mount, while you tarry among us sinners."

"A song! a sermon! a sermon! a song!" called out the other outlaws.

"Let Loud Sing make music," added Black Dog, who possessed in a slight degree a sense of humor.

"Really, my friends," said the Salvationist, "I am in a very great hurry to reach Red Ruin by to-morrow night. I am told it is a wicked camp, and I would rescue it before it is entirely lost. So, under the circumstances, couldn't you excuse me this time?"

"No! no! no!" shouted the outlaws, in chorus.

"Yes, give us a short cut right from the shoulder," Hector added; "somethin' for a nightcap—to dream 'bout."

So urgently did the outlaws insist on a sermon from the old man that the latter, apparently unaware that he was the mere object of brutal sport, finally consented to sing a hymn and talk to them a few minutes.

Removing his hat, adjusting his choker and clearing his throat, he sang:

"Pass me not, oh, gentle Savior,
Hear my humble cry, etc."

His voice was clear and melodious, and he sung with a feeling and pathos that would have stirred the soul of any one possessing a grain of the more tender sentiments of the human heart. The echoes took up the refrain and carried it abroad into the night until it seemed a choir of invisible spirits hovered among the hills.

The Indians listened in silence, but the outlaws seemed restless and uneasy, and with winks and guilty smiles exchanged glances with each other.

And Socorro Dan, as if suddenly reminded of something, glanced toward the walled grotto, and was visibly startled by sight of a sad, white face gazing over the stone wall at the singer. But as if dispelled by the villain's hateful stare, the face instantly sunk down behind the barricade.

After he had finished singing Salvation Sam gave out a text—quoting from memory—and then proceeded to business in a downright, earnest way. Black Dog, who understood English fairly well, listened attentively, while most of his warriors rolled over on the ground and went to sleep.

The outlaws seemed decidedly amused, though at times Socorro Dan was observed to slightly wince under the preacher's fire, but with affected indifference he sat tossing pebbles into the fire and watching the sparks go dancing up into the air, ever and anon glancing toward the grotto.

Finally, when Salvation Sam had finished his sermon, the Vulture sprang to his feet and proposed three cheers for the preacher which were given with a will.

The old man appeared to take it all in good part, and putting on his hat announced his intention of departing on his journey. The outlaws made no objections. Socorro Dan was glad to get rid of him. He was afraid he might discover the presence of the captive, and as he—the preacher—was evidently on good terms with the capricious Black Dog, there was no telling what influence might be brought to bear upon him.

With a friendly "good-night" the old Salvationist departed.

"Cracked in the upper story!" declared the outlaw, Hercules.

"Yes, but a rattling singer, and a spankin' good talker," added Hector. "He threw some hot-shot into this camp—one or two that made Socorro Dan's squirm, and—"

"I was afraid," interrupted the Desert Vulture, "he'd see the gal. She peeped up over the wall a time or two and if the old lunny'd looked that way he'd been sure to 'a' seen her, and it might caused us lots of grief. Of course, he's harmless as a suckin' dove. No sane man'd be trampin' round these hills wastin' time and breath tryin' to convert Trojans into Christians. His dress gives him dead away."

"Dan'l," spoke up Captain Trojan, "don't bank too much on that man's lunacy. There may be a method in his lunacy that'll bring you to grief anyhow. If I'd been boss of this camp I'd kept him here to-night, anyhow, if Red Ruin had sunk to the lowest pit for want of his presence. Them's my sentiments clean cut."

"You may be right, Cap," replied the Vulture. "It isn't too late to bring him back yet. I'll get Black Dog's permission."

This he had no difficulty in obtaining, and so he and the burly Hercules started off at once after the old "pilgrim."

They overtook him at the lower watch-fire, where he had stopped to exchange a word with the Indian guards.

"Say, Salvation Samuel," called out Socorro Dan, "we have come after you to go back and stay all night with us."

"I cannot possibly do it," declared the old Salvationist.

"But you must," persisted the Desert Vulture; "Black Dog sent us after you."

"I must decline to go," was the old man's answer.

"Then we'll have to take you!" and the two outlaws advanced toward him.

"Keep away!" he cried, extending his long arms and nervously shaking his bony hands; "keep away! do not lay hands on me, I beg of you!"

"Look here, Salvation Sam!" exclaimed Socorro Dan, bristling up as if to frighten the preacher into submission, "you don't want to git obstreperous and compel us to use force! Do you see them bracelets? I'm a bad man from the Sandy Desert, I am!"

"So'm I!" exclaimed the preacher, shoving a derringer into the face of each of the outlaws; "I'm Kit Bandy, the Mountain Detective, I am!"

CHAPTER X.

A FEW SURPRISES.

HAD a demon leaped out of the earth and confronted the two outlaws with eyes of flame, Socorro Dan could not have been more startled, terrified, than when Salvation Sam declared he was Kit Bandy; for, in the changed voice, the clean-shaved yet rigid features, the blaze of those eyes into which he had once before looked in the Red Ruin Saloon, the Desert Vulture recognized, indeed, the dreaded Mountain Detective in flesh and blood.

Starting back with surprise and terror, the red-faced desperado ducked his head just as the pistols of the old detective rung out as one. The bullet passed over his head, but Hercules fell dead—shot through the brain.

At this instant the three Indian guards gave utterance to a yell and bounded forward to the assistance of their friends.

Socorro Dan, recovering from his sudden surprise, made a lunge at Bandy as the latter turned to flee, but, stumbling over the body of Hercules, he fell. As he went down he made a grab at the "preacher" and seized his long coat-tail and endeavored to hold him until the Indians came up.

Bandy turned to kick the Vulture loose, and as he did so the tail of his coat parted from the waist. At the same instant the old detective saw a dark object come whirling from the shadows of a bush at the side of the canyon and strike among the red-skins who had just then reached Socorro Dan's side.

Then the old man beheld a confusion of flying limbs, he heard a few quick, dull blows, gasps and groans, and, lo! the three red-skins lay prone upon the earth with the outlaw—all in a struggling heap, from which bounced a lithe figure as though it were animated rubber.

"Little Fury! by the horn o' Joshua!" burst from Old Kit's lips in evident astonishment.

"Yes!" exclaimed the Young Whirlwind, grasping the old detective by the arms, "let's run, Kit Bandy, for the whole Ingin camp is comin' a-boomin'!"

Together the two disappeared in the shadows

of the canyon as the Indians and outlaws came tearing down from camp.

Black with impotent rage, Socorro Dan rose to his feet and ordered the savages to pursue the old detective, alternating each word with an oath.

"What's the matter, Dan?" asked Captain Trojan, as he approached the raving villain.

"I'd ask that!" snarled the Vulture, with eyes green with anger and rage. "The matter is we're all a set of fools—blind, stupid idiots as ever grinned outside a lunatic asylum! Salvation Sam was Kit Bandy!"

"No!" exclaimed Captain Trojan, in astonishment.

"Yes!" snarled the Desert Vulture.

"Thought he was shot and cremated."

"Well, so did I," responded the desperado, "but he wasn't, that's all. In the tall, slick-tongued, smooth-faced, preacher-dressed Salvation Sam I could not recognize one solitary feature of Old Sol Soaker, the bum. But when he told me his name I saw, quick enough, that same hell-burning fire in his eyes that I'd seen on a similar occasion in the Red Ruin Saloon. It was a glare that the very devil himself would recoil from. I tell you, Kit Bandy possesses the uncanny power of self-transformation. The only way for those he persecutes to get rid of him will be to kill every tramp, preacher, geologist, and fine haired gentleman found in the hills."

Meanwhile Kit Bandy and Little Fury were speeding down the canyon like a pair of young bucks.

They refrained from talking until they had put a safe distance between them and danger, when Old Kit, resuming his natural manner of speech, said:

"So you are Little Fury, ar'n't you, boy?"

"That's what I'm called, Mr. Bandy," Frank replied.

"You're a screamer, boy," the old detective declared—"a brass-bound whirlwind. I see'd something whirl out 'mong them Ingins—heard a slap, cug, grunt and gasp, and—the deed was did, and the red-skins war all down. Did ye kill 'em, boy?"

"No," replied Frank; "I just whirled in on a handspring and applied heel, head and fist in the faces and stomachs of the varlets. It's not a killing way to fight, but it musses up a crowd nicely and quickly; and then I can kick and butt so much harder than I can strike."

"Hal hal ha!" laughed Bandy; "you're a Gatlin' gun cyclone, boy, and Kit Bandy's proud o' your society."

"And so you are really Kit Bandy, the detective?"

"Yes, boy, the only and original Ka-ristopher Ko-lumbus Bandy," replied the old man; "and I'm free to confess that, within the last week, I've landed squar' in a hornets' nest o' fun and fight. I got a close call at Red Ruin t'other night. The rumor went out that I'd been shot and burnt up in the saloon, but I didn't believe it when I heard it. I did git a welt from a bullet across the temple that knocked me silly, and then the saloon took fire and everybody ran off in a panic. But I gobbled up presence o' mind enuff to carry my anatomy out o' the burnin' buildin' at a back winder, while the others war scramblin' out in front. Arter thinkin' the matter over a while, I concluded to let 'em think I war cremated, and havin' held a short confab with my pard, Ichabod Flea, I hied me to these hills whar I thought I'd business; and I have."

"When I saw you comin' down the canyon," said Little Fury, "I thought you was a fine, stylish old gentleman—"

"Ye missed it a mile, boy!" interrupted Kit, "I war Salvation Sam—mild as a lamb and meek as a maiden, and as such would 'a' gone away if them dimmed critters hadn't crowded me. When they did, the Bandy within me pirouted right out on its south ear and I let my irons off, killin' one o' the sinners, and I'd 'a' dittoed the other if he hadn't dodged. The hyena got my coat-tail in spite o' me, and I reckon all I need now is a white apron and straw cuffs to look like a Denver bartender. But say, boy, what are you doin' up here?"

"Shadowing the outlaws in hopes of rescuing a young girl that's in their clutches," the boy answered. "Did you see her when you were in their camp?"

"I pretended not to see her, my boy."

"Then you did see her?"

"A fairer face was never shadowed in grief," the old man went on, avoiding a direct answer—"just such a face as would turn the head of any young man, or old one either, if he dare look on the wine when it's red. Let me, right

here, warn you, lad, never to let the pretty face o' a gal git hold o' your affections, or Little Whirlwind 'll be subdued so quick that he'll hardly pass for a summer zephyr. I know whereof I speak, for, in an evil hour, I, a young, handsome, dashin' and romantic buccaneer, led Sabina Ellen Frisby to the hyeneal alter, and now, alas! what am I? who am I? why am I?"

"Boy, I'm a total wreck. If it war light enough I could show what love did for me. Across as intellect'al a brow as ever promised Solomonian wisdom runs an Allegahnab Mountain my wife Sabina graded with a pick-handle. That's a solid fact, boy! Over above my left ear is an extinct volcanic crater, where the pole o' a hatchet in Ellen's hand smashed haydoogins o' choice intellect. Then the beautiful, cantilever bridge o' my classical nose went down in a poker gale that had its origin in Bina's wrath. One o' my ears lops and flops in the wind like a rag; Ellen took the starch outen it with a dornick. All over me, in fact, are the scars o' wedded bliss. My epidermis is wu'ss marred and scratched than the map o' Europe. Oh! I'm a wreck, boy—the Ruins o' Babylon, the downfall o' the Roman Empire, the destruction o' Herculaneum—Napoleon at St. Helena—a devastation o' useful knowledge and recipes. And, Whirlwind, Sabina still lives, and so do I, but I keep shady, and amongst b'ars, and Ingins, and outlaws and cyclones for protection. So beware, boy, I beseech you!"

"Your wife," said Little Fury, when the old man had concluded his lamentations, "must have been a fury. But I think her case an exceptional one."

"Yes," suddenly came a voice from the darkness near, "and I consider Kit Bandy a p'izonous fraud and exceptional great liar!"

Instantly the click of Little Fury's revolver was heard.

"Hold, Whirlwind!" exclaimed Bandy, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder, "if I mistake not that war the yawp of Old Tom Rattler."

"That's whose it is, Kitsie," affirmed the voice; "push out your flipper, you ancient, hoary fraud, and come in contact with an honest man and friend!"

"God bless you, Tom Rattler!" burst from Old Kit's lips, and the two old veterans of many a hard-fought campaign clasped hands and hugged each other in wild delight and joy. In fact, Old Kit so far forgot himself that Little Fury had to remind him of their danger before the old friends could be got in motion again.

Then Tom Rattler said to the young scout:

"Whirlwind, it fills my heart with joy to find you alive. I've been terrible afeard you war in trouble. I stumbled across your pony next day arter you left camp. It war runnin' loose in the canyon. I begun lookin' for you, and as I couldn't find you I turned yer pony loose, havin' fu'st written an appeal on the saddle for help. I thought the critter might go back to camp and a searchin' party be sent out."

"Then you hav'n't been in Red Ruin since I left?"

"No; I've been huntin' for you and watchin' the movement o' a gang o' red-skins up the canyon," replied Rattler; "but, Whirlwind, I reckon you never got through to Leadville, eh?"

"I got no further than Bethesda Pool," the boy answered, and then he briefly narrated his adventure there with the outlaws, his imprisonment in the chamber of delusion, and discovery of the Trojan outlaws' den.

"I tell ye, Tom," Bandy put in, "I've struck a hornets' nest this whirl, and got my hands more'n full. I'm glad you turned up, ole pard, for if you're not too old to fight thar's a splendid lay-out for us all. How is't, Tom, are ye still on yer muscle, and ugly as ye ever war?"

"Kitsie," said Old Tom, "as to fightin' I'm better'n ever. Why, I'm just beginnin' to git my hand in, and take second place to no man. As to unholy ugliness I stand second to Kit Bandy, and as for deception and paralyzin' falsehood, I ain't in hearin' o' that noted detective. But jokin' aside, Kitsie, how've ye been? Whar ye been? How's Mrs. Bandy? and Ichabod Flea? Ar'n't ye ever goin' to die? Speak out, pard."

"Horn o' Joshua!" exclaimed Bandy; "if thar's anything else you want to know, Tom, reel it off while you're wound up. A gump can ax questions, but it takes a wise man to answer."

"It seems to me," said Little Fury, "you old friends fire into each other pretty hot."

"It's all in fun, lad, all in fun!" cried Old Kit, "but oh! horn o' Joshua! you'd ought to see us fire ourselves into a nest o' red-skins! It's a pleasure to see Tom Rattler fight. He's a regular ole buck cyclone, and war never known to turn his back on any livin' foe, or—"

"Whizz!"

It was a missile of some sort, hurled by the hand of an unseen foe, that flew over the speaker's head, bringing his speech to a sudden close.

"Tracks, boys!" was the quick command of Tom Rattler, and as the three started off at a double-quick, a wild Indian war-whoop 'woke the silent night.

CHAPTER XI.

HELD FOR RANSOM.

We left the Mayor of Red Ruin Camp in his office in no pleasant frame of mind over the contents of a note he had found on his table.

Acting upon a first impulse he mentally declared the note a malicious falsehood, and "Zadoc," whoever "Zadoc" was, an evil-minded, cowardly wretch who deserved the attention of Judge Lynch.

Once the mayor made up his mind to treat the whole matter with silent contempt; but upon reflection he thought it would be better to take the matter under consideration—at least, until "Zadoc" should present some proof of the maiden being an impostor.

So he laid the whole thing aside and went to bed. When he awoke next morning the sun was an hour high. Having breakfasted he repaired to his office to complete some unfinished business.

The young man's mind had been cleared by sleep and rest, and it was not now at conflict with those new-born emotions of his heart. He could consider "Zadoc's" warning note calmly and dispassionately. He carefully reviewed every incident touching upon the subject from the death of John Walworth down to the finding of the note; but unless "Zadoc" knew more than what he could deduce from those incidents, it seemed he had no grounds whatever upon which to base suspicion. The only thing connected directly or indirectly with the Walworths that gave him any concern, was the continued absence of Little Fury. That the boy had met with trouble there was little doubt in his mind.

About the middle of the afternoon his fears were in a measure confirmed by a miner leading up to the door of his office Little Fury's pony. The man had caught the animal coming riderless down the gulch. The bridle and saddle were on it, and upon the broader leathers of the saddle, in several places, was rudely scratched the word, "Help."

"Rich," said the mayor, "that boy's in trouble!"

"I'm afraid so, Vaughn," the miner replied.

"That appeal for 'help' must be heeded," the mayor declared. "I shall raise a party and go at once to his relief."

"Count me one of the party," said Rich.

"Very well, Joe. Take the pony to its stable, and get ready. I want a party of at least ten men well armed for we may have fighting to do."

"By the way, mayor," observed Rich, "isn't it a little queer that old hunter, Tom Rattler, who was to stay with us till Frank got back, has never showed up since yesterday morning?"

"He, too, may be in trouble," answered Vaughn.

"And then what become of that feller that slipped the darbies on Socorro Dan's wrists when Kit Bandy covered the outlaw in the Magnet? You remember Bandy called him Ichabod Flea? He hasn't been heard of since."

"It's all very strange," Vaughn was forced to admit, and at the same time it flashed across his mind that the man Flea might possibly be "Zadoc."

Locking his office the mayor concluded to call on Miss Walworth before starting in search of Little Fury.

He at once made his way to the Walworth cabin, and was met at the door with a pleasant welcome from the young mistress.

It was the first time he had met the girl in daylight, and she seemed fairer than ever; but there was a look of distress upon her face. Her eyes were red with weeping and her voice half-choked.

"I am glad you called, Mr. Vaughn," she said; "I have been wanting to see you."

"I hope I find you feeling better, Miss Walworth," he replied, "after your night's rest."

"In body I do, but in mind and heart I do not," was the girl's answer. "I cannot make up my mind to remain in Red Ruin, so I have decided to sell my interest in the Jolly Jane and return to my old home East."

"I am sorry to hear this," Vaughn replied, in a tone of deep regret; "of course, brought up as you have been, it's hard to become satisfied with a place like Red Ruin. And yet, I hope you may reconsider your decision, and stay awhile with us, at least. I assure you that everything that men can do make you happy, comfortable and safe will be done."

"I do not doubt that, Mr. Vaughn," Florence replied, "and am grateful for your kind assurances. But I shall adhere to my decision to sell out and return home. To Mr. Luce I have already given the refusal of my interest in the mine for twenty thousand dollars."

"Twenty thousand!" exclaimed Vaughn; "why, my dear friend, it's worth ten times that sum! I would have given you treble that amount had I known you wished to sell."

"I'm sorry," Florence said, regretfully, "but it's too late now. Twenty thousand dollars in hand seemed like a great fortune to me."

"I would not insinuate that Mr. Luce had cheated you, Miss Walworth," said Vaughn, "but he surely underestimated the value of your stock in the Jolly Jane."

"I trusted in his honor because he was my father's friend and partner," replied Florence, in deep sincerity.

"Well, that was your privilege, to be sure, Miss Walworth," the mayor said; "but how soon do you expect to leave Red Ruin?"

"By the first stage that goes north to Leadville."

"That will be day after to-morrow if the stage due to-morrow gets in," Vaughn said. "The reason I asked is this: our young scout, Little Fury, whom your father sent to meet you at Leadville, is, I fear, in trouble, and I am going with a party in search of him, and hope to get back before you depart."

"I trust you may," Florence replied, manifesting no little emotion, "and I hope you may find the young man unharmed."

Once during his visit Vaughn was on the eve of disclosing the contents of Zadoc's note, but his better judgment prevailed, and he kept his secret.

When he left Miss Florence's cabin he started off to make the necessary arrangements for the relief of Little Fury. He had no difficulty in raising a party of ten stalwart young miners, notwithstanding the opposition he met from some quarters. These were all well-armed with rifles and revolvers, provided with a couple days' rations of food and a blanket each.

An hour or two before sunset the party set off on its mission, leaving the camp in a somewhat feverish condition.

To Marshal Benson Mayor Vaughn had entrusted the safety of the camp, and despite that officer's assurances to the contrary, there were a number of men who got it into their heads that some impending danger hung over Red Ruin, and they decided to call a meeting of the camp that night to discuss the matter, and take such steps as were deemed necessary for the protection of the place.

The meeting was held in the largest cabin in camp. The building was packed full. Mr. Luce, of the Jolly Jane, presided. In taking the chair he expressed surprise at the mayor going away on a tramp into the hills at a time when his presence and counsel were so much needed at home.

Considerable discussion ensued. The mayor was severely censured by some, and as earnestly defended by others. When the former were called upon to state what grounds they based their fears of impending danger upon, not a man could do so. But the discussion went on, and the meeting was about to break up in a midnight row when a wild, hysterical shriek at the door startled the whole house.

Every eye was at once turned toward the door, in which stood a short, stout negress swaying to and fro, wringing her hands, and emitting one wild shriek after another as though she were in an agony of pain, or hysterical fit.

This negress was known to all Red Ruin as "Old Pansy," and that she had become the servant and companion of Florence Walworth since her advent there.

"What's the matter, Aunt Pansy?" asked Marshal Benson, approaching the old woman.

A prolonged wail answered him.

"Come, Pansy, shut up that screamin'," commanded Benson, "and tell us what ails you? Who hurt you? What's wrong?"

"Oh, Lor'! Massa Benson! Oh, Lor'!" groaned

the wench, wringing her fat hands till her finger-joints cracked.

"Out with it—quick!"

"Oh! I s'pects you'll kill me, anyhow, massa!"

"I will if you don't stop this confounded howlin' and tell me what it's all about."

"It's 'bout de young missus; oh, Lor'!"

"Well, go on; what about her?" persisted Benson.

"Massa, I jist done gone down to see Mrs. Schooler who war sick, and make her some yarb tea, and when I went back home, de young missus— Oh!—de young Missus Florence was done gone!"

"Gone where?" questioned Benson.

"Don't know—couldn't find her," answered Old Pansy; "but I found dis heah papah w'at's writ on, and I run down to Mrs. Schooler, and she read it, and told me to bring hit down to de meetin'."

Taking the paper, he read it over to himself, then fairly trembling with excitement, he exclaimed:

"Listen, miners of Red Ruin; while you've been wrangling here over the action of Mayor Vaughn going to the assistance of a friend, this is what has happened:

"TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:—Miss Florence Walworth is now a captive in the power of determined, fearless men. She will be taken to where we defy others to even attempt to follow. She will be held for ransom—ten thousand dollars. She will be kindly cared for. Whenever her friends are ready to open negotiations, a card published in the Leadville Herald, addressed to 'X-XX,' stating the fact, will receive prompt attention. Any attempt to effect her release otherwise than by ransom, will necessitate an increase in the amount above named. Detectives and scouts we defy. X-XX."

A deathlike stillness was in the room when Benson finished reading the paper. Chairman Luce was the first to speak.

"It's all a hoax!" he said, with a look of contempt; "a canard got up to create excitement and break up this meeting."

However, an investigation was at once made, and as the heiress of the Jolly Jane could not be found within the camp, they were forced to acknowledge the startling fact: she had been abducted and carried off into the hills while they were quarreling over a matter of minor importance.

"Just now," said Marshal Benson, when it was found Florence had gone, and the place was running wild with excitement, "one hour of Little Fury and Harry Vaughn would be worth a thousand years of this half panic-stricken camp."

CHAPTER XII.

KIT BANDY'S STORY.

ELUDING the red skins that had almost taken them by surprise, Kit Bandy, Tom Rattler and Little Fury finally turned from Crow Wing Canyon, ascended a slope of the mountain and halted among the shadows of some pine bushes.

"Well," said Little Fury, with evident impatience, "what are we going to do now?"

"I'd like to get that gal out o' that camp," answered Old Kit, "but, since I stirred up the hornets' nest, I reckon it'll be impossible to do so. It was to make sure that a gal was there that I had recourse to my disguise as Salvation Sam, the old preacher."

"Oh, great Rosycrusians!" cried Old Tom; "the idea of Kit Bandy passin' hisself off as a preacher makes me weary, sad, sick!"

"I know it looks sacrilegious," Kit responded, "but I think the end justified the means. I've been guilty o' passin' myself off as different people, good and bad, but I've never been guilty o' tryin' to pass myself off as Old Tom Rattler. Salvation Sam worked well among the Ingins, for I'd been preachin' among them a few months ago while huntin' down some villains that war supposed to be in the Ute country."

"Kit, have you any idea who that captive girl is?" questioned Little Fury.

"Well, I dropped onto somethin' t'other day that put me figgerin'," the old detective replied, evasively; "I reckon you haven't heard 'bout the stage-robbery t'other day?"

"Rosycrusians! no!" exclaimed Old Tom.

"I found out last night there had been one," Little Fury said; "and I learned, also, that the driver and one passenger'd been killed. More than this I did not learn certain."

"Well, I'll tell you my bull story," Old Kit said; "as Old Sol Soaker, the bum, I war kicked out o' camp at Red Ruin, and while saunterin' leisurely along the gulch drinkin' in the mountain air—havin' nothin' else to drink, for my bottle was empty—I heard the stage comin'

tearin' down the pass. Jist for fun I hid, and when it come up I bounded out like a festive road-agent, ordered it to halt, and kivered the driver with two-fingers. The ribboner drew up, of course, and then, after a few words, I bounced into the boot and informed the driver I war goin' to ride back to camp. Thinkin' he'd have some fun with me he let me ride, and away we dashed.

"But we hadn't gone but a little ways when we war halted by gnuine, unadulterated outlaws; and we'd scarcely stopped afore a pistol cracked and the driver tumbled out o' the boot dead. In makin' an effort to catch his fallin' body I went heels over appetite to the ground. Why they didn't shoot me then and there I know not, 'less they didn't want to waste ammunition. But they made me trot down for'd and hold the mules while they went through the passengers."

"Now, thar war four passengers on that coach—three men and one woman. One o' them war a large, red-faced feller callin' hisself Major Hines, and I mention his name because I've met him since. The lady-passenger war none other than Florence Walworth, darter o' the dead miner."

"All four, gal and all, were ordered out o' the coach. One o' the men, a plucky little tenderfoot, bounced out, made up his mind to fight, when he was promptly killed."

"Great Rosycrusians!" burst indignantly from Old Rattler's lips; "and what war the desperate Kit Bandy doin' 'bout that time?"

"Sol Soaker war tremblin' y busy holdin' the mules—Bandy wasn't thar 'bout that time," Kit went on; "but Sol's eyes war dom' a power o' watchin' jist the same. Well, the lady-passenger, whose face was kivered with a veil, for she'd been weepin', havin' heard o' her father's death thro' a messenger sent to meet the stage, war made to git out on the opposite side, so I didn't see but a glimpse o' her."

"Right near whar she got out war a clump of bushes thick as darkness, and into them bushes the outlaws marched the poor gal and the two men."

"A terrible fear rushed through the brain o' Sol Soaker 'bout that time, and he war jist about to call Old Kit Bandy to the rescue or death, when, lol the passengers returned, robbed of their valuables, of course, tho' they'd only been out o' sight 'bout two minutes. I thought it queer 'bout the villains takin' the passengers into the bushes, but I disklivered when they came back what it war done for. They didn't bring back the same gal they took, but another!"

"Great Rosycrusians!" cried Old Tom; "are ye lyin', Kit?"

"The heartless fiends!" exclaimed Little Fury; "but go on, Kit."

"As I said before," Bandy resumed, "I did not see the first gal's face, and only got a glimpse of her form. She war clad in a long, linen rig, with a hat and white plume and a veil over her face—"

"Then how could you tell it wer'n't the same gal, Kitsie?"

"Be patient, Tom, and I'll git to that. The gal that came back, and war assisted into the coach by the gallant Major Hines, wore the same linen coat, the same hat and plume, with the same veil over her face. If Old Sol Soaker'd been drunker than he pertended to be, he'd never detected anything wrong—that a 'change o' women had been made, and he wouldn't anyhow if it hadn't been for one little thing. When the gal got out o' the coach, I saw her foot when she placed it on the step, and it was clad in russet-colored travelin' shoes; and when the gal got into the coach, I saw her foot and it war incased in black kid boots! Jist this—a glimpse o' a woman's foot—aroused a suspicion in Sol Soaker's breast."

"Mebby, Kitsie," said Old Tom, "you war scart so that you war color-blind—couldn't tell russet from black. I've heard o' sich things in my time. Like as not the gal got some red dust on her shoes arter she got out, for the dust o' Roarin' Gulch is reddish."

"Tom Rattler," spoke up Old Kit, sharply, "you're gittin' must on your ole foggy brain, that's what ails you."

"Well, well, go on, Kit, with your story," urged Little Fury, with burning impatience.

"When the outlaws had stripped the passengers o' their wealth and gone off," Kit continued, "the passengers found theirselves in a dilemma—neither one o' them knew how to handle six fractious mules. But the road-agents seemed to 'a' anticipated their wants, and that's why they didn't shoot me. Red-faced Major Hines offered me a bottle o' rum 'f I'd ride the

nigh lead mule into Red Ruin. I'cepted the offer and next minute war aloft that mule's back, goin' down that gulch like a hurricane, my long, timber legs swingin' to and fro, and whalin' the air and slashin' the mules under the jacket till they were mad. Fu'st mile war covered in forty-seven seconds, and by that time we'd jist got fairly startled, and Red Face, who war in the boot holdin' on the lines, yelled like mad for me to slow up. But it war all I could do to stick onto that mule without monkeyin', and I stuck, and I'll bet I landed that stage in Red Ruin, over a ten-mile run, quicker'n war ever made by hoss-flesh.

"Thar war lots o' brimstony words said when it war diskivered that Sol Soaker had returned to camp, for they'd said a man too woefully weary to feed his face when hungry couldn't loiter on in that industrial metropolis. But Major Hines, the gallant red-faced passengier, told 'em how I come to be back thar, and so they give me twenty-four hours to git away ag'in, or hang.

"The major alighted and put up at the hotel, while Miss Florence Walworth was driven to her father's cabin, which'd been set in order for her by the weemin-folks o' the camp.

"Now, I said Miss Walwrth war in the coach when 'tacked by the road-agents. The fact is that I didn't know who she war at the time, nor till the stage arriv' in Red Ruin. Then when I learned it war Miss Walworth, and remembered the black and russet shoes, I begun to figger, and made up my mind that two and two made four.

"After nightfall I called at the tavern to see Hines and git my flask o' rum. The red-faced major wer'n't thar. He'd gone up to The Magnet Saloon. So up I went to that liquid loadstone, and thar found the major playin' poker with the big miner, Purple Nose Jack."

"Where'd he git his money if he'd been robbed by the road-agents?" queried Rattler.

"That's what I axed Sol Soaker, and at once concluded that two and two war six. But I found out that when the major fu'st went up to The Magnet he'd boasted o' havin' fooled the road-agents and, not only secreted three hundred dollars, but his gold watch also. And after takin' eight or ten drinks he got boisterous for a game o' poker, and when Purple Nose Jack came in he perce'ded to accommodate the gentl'man.

"When I got in the game war runnin' lively and thar war great excitement. The stakes war limited, and from the fu'st the luck run to Purple Nose Jack, the miner. But the red-faced passenger was sandy as an ostrich's craw, and he kept whackin' up. But stake after stake went down into Purple Nose's pants with dizzy rapidity. Purple's wealth war increasin' like a national debt. It war a run o' luck that would 'a' swamped a Bank o' England arter 'while, and the result war that every dollar the road-agents had overlooked on red-face's clothes war transferred to Purple's jeans. But reddy wasn't to be downed yit. He war game as a buck elk, and pullin' out his gold watch planked it down and called Purp to cover it.

"Some questions as to the value of the timer arose, and afore this was settled, I squeeze my sylphish form through the crowd and got a peep at the jewel, and my heart gave a wild kick for it looked edactly like a clicker I war lookin' for. So I edged in closer, and put out my hand and innocently took up the ticker, and looked at it with the childish admiration and simplicity o' an Old Tom Rattler.

"Then, as I wasn't promptly knocked over, or kicked out The Magnet, or ordered to put the beauty down, I opened the case and glanced fondly at the glittering, flittering works, and the number o' the little machine, when lo! it war the identical number that I wanted, and closin' it up, I slid the shiner into my pocket.

"Whew! with a snort reddy r'ared up on his dew-claws, and ordered me, with powerful, majestic profanity, to lay the root o' evil chronometer down. I told him I wanted it and looked one o' my ole ferocious looks. The crowd laughed with surprise. That made the major hotter'n a hornet's vanguard goin' backwards, and his red face grew black with rage, and he flashed a look o' witherin' scorn at the miners, and then to me he thundered out that if I, Sol Soaker, knew who he—Major Hines—war, I'd not babboon with him.

"And it came to pass jist at that moment that I recognized the wild, unholy terror, the genial Major Hines, as the desperado, Socorro Dan, and so I informed him, at the same time introducin' Ka-risstopher Ko-lumbuss Bandy to the Desert Vulture, and insinuated a saucy, little, lightin' perforater into his physiognomy,

and with as sublime magnificence as a clap o' July thunder, invited him to throw aloft his strong hands. The feller was no fool. He knew when the drop was on him, and up went his arms in noble shape.

"Then my little pard, Ichabod Flea, slipped up behind him and snapped a pair o' handcuffs on his wrists before you could say 'Scat.'

"The next moment a bullet from somewhere came roaming through the air, swatted me lightly along the brow, but heavy enough to stretch me silly. Then, so Ichabod told me, some one knocked the lamp out, the oil took fire and in an instant the room was ablaze with lurid flame, the crowd became panic-stricken, and away it rushed for the door, Socorro Dan and all—every feller bent on saving hisself. My little pard was swept from the room by the mad rush, and before he could get out o' the jam the whole room was afire, and he couldn't enter for my body. But he wouldn't 'a' found it if he'd got in, for I got my senses before half the frantic mob was out, and flung my precious self out at a back window, or air-hole. Then I gave a signal which brought my delighted pard to my side; and when he told me the miners considered me cremated, I concluded to let 'em think so.

"Ichabod and I begun to figger on the russet boots, Major Hines, the money and watch he'd fooled the outlaws out of, and the shot that came so close to my mug, and we found that two and two war seven, and away we went for the hills, I havin' left a note signed 'Zadoc,' warnin' Mayor Vaughn to watch out for impostors in certain quarters.

"Over in these hills, not many leagues from here, Ichabod and I made a temporary stoppin' place in a cave. There had we left some disguises and things when we went down to Red Ruin to do some work in a great robbery and murder case we've had on hand some time, and in which that gold watch and the festive Major Hines figger up immensely. But by accident—merely the sight of a woman's foot—I got onto a new case in which some o' the old actors are or seem to be involved. We discovered that a party of Utes, under my old friend, Black Dog, war in Crow Wing Canyon, and that there war a female captive in their power. So I hied me to our cave, laid the razor to the roots o' my venerable beard and came forth smooth-shaven and smilin'. Then I donned my 'Salvation Sam' outfit—in which Black Dog had seen me—and struck boldly for the Ingin camp to see if the gal o' the russet shoes war there."

"Wal, what did ye diskiver?" asked Old Rattler.

"The gal is a captive in Black Dog's camp!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ATTACK.

To Little Fury Old Kit's revelation was not entirely a surprise, for he had overheard enough in the outlaws' den to lead him to suspect that Florence Walworth was the prisoner he had seen in their power. His suspicions now confirmed, he sprung to his feet in a fever of excitement, anxious to move at once against the Indians and outlaws.

"Keep cool, Whirlwind," advised the old detective; "we can do nothin' to-night. That villain, Socorro Dan, is in that camp with other outlaws, and they'll be on their guard from this on. They're twenty to one, and we'll have to wait and trust to stratagem to effect her release."

"I'm afraid, Kit, the poor girl will be dead before then," Little Fury said, in a dejected tone; but of course, you know what is best. And so there is a girl at Red Ruin passing herself as Florence Walworth?"

"There's such a gal there, Whirlwind," Kit replied, "but, mind you, I don't say positive, she's not the gal that should be there. As I said, I saw no woman's face when the coach was held up, and my whole suspicion are based on what I did see—those russet and black shoes. Thar's room for my bein' mistaken, of course, but I'd be willin' to stake Tom Rattler's reputation on it, anyhow. And even if I am mistaken, the gal in yander Ingin camp is thar as a captive, whoever she may be, and it becomes us as men and mountaineers to save her."

"But I should have thought the passengers would 'a' known somethin' about the exchange of girls by the outlaws," said Little Fury.

"I believe the passengers were all into the conspiracy 'cept the driver and the young man who showed fight, and them two war promptly shot. If I had got into the coach when I boarded it, instead o' on top, as the Lord seemed to 'a' directed, I'd been shot, too. As to Socorro

Dan, I've no doubt o' his bein' in the job, and I think that other fellow, Barnes, war also, for he war the fellow sent to carry the news o' Walworth's death to the gal then on her way to Red Ruin. To make sure o' my position, I knew a second gal must be found, and that's why I said nothin' and struck out to find another gal. Now I have found one, and the next thing's to find out if she war taken from that coach. But, boys, we'd as well make the best o' our position and rest here till morning."

To this the other consented, and the night was passed there sleeping and watching by turns.

The next morning Old Tom was the last to awake, and when he did, and got a square view of Old Kit in his suit of broad-cloth—the tail of his coat missing—and his high hat tipped back on his head, he burst into a peal of laughter.

After a passage at words between the two old whimsical friends, the three set off along the mountain slope in the direction of Black Dog's Camp, keeping well under cover. As they approached the camp, they saw nor heard anything of the foe, and at length discovered they had decamped.

There being no doubt as to the course the foe had taken, the trio pushed on, keeping well up on the mountain slope where the pines were thicker, and there was less danger of an ambush.

Some five miles from Black Dog's late camp, they came suddenly upon a smoldering camp-fire, by the side of which lay half the carcass of a recently slain deer.

Old Tom Rattler at once pronounced it the bivouac of white men—whether friends or foes, he could not, of course, determine; but there was one thing they all did determine very readily, and that was to have some breakfast off the remainder of the deer carcass lying before them. So they fell to, cut the meat in slices, broiled it on the hot coals and devoured it with relish.

Resuming their journey, they pressed on at a steady gait. Along toward noon, Little Fury, who was some distance below and in advance of Kit and Tom acting as scout, came hurrying back with the news that he had sighted the foe, who were pushing up the canyon. They still had the maiden with them. She was seated upon a framework of poles and sticks covered over with blankets, and being carried by four Indians. There were no less than seven or eight outlaws in the party, which numbered over fifty persons.

"Our chances ag'inst such odds are slim as Kit Bandy," Old Rattler said, with a look of regret; "but the time's been when I could make the hull gang heaps o' trouble alone."

"We three could now, if it wer'n't for the gal," said Bandy; "but that no harm may come to her, we've got to wait and watch."

An hour later it was discovered the foe had halted to rest and eat dinner at a point where the canyon widened into a little oblong valley, or park, some thirty rods in width, and just above where a sharp tongue or backbone of rock was thrust out like a spear-head into the valley.

Crawling down as close as was consistent with safety, Bandy and his companions took a careful survey of the party. It was a savage and murderous-looking gang, and the trio was forced to admit that the chances for the maiden's rescue were not very encouraging.

While they sat discussing the situation, the ever restless eyes of Little Fury suddenly detected a number of moving figures among the rocks and bushes on the sloping hillside on the opposite side of the canyon, to which he at once called the attention of his friends.

At first they were not sure whether they were the forms of animals or men, but they were not long left in doubt. They were human forms.

"It are either red-skins or whites!" declared Rattler, "and I'd say the latter—them whose camp we breakfasted in, I'll warrant. If so, who be they?"

"Whoever they be," answered Bandy, his eyes fixed on the opposite slope, "they're doin' the Tom Rattler act—in other words, the sneak-act, on them varlets in the valley."

"It doesn't occur to your valorous intellect, Kitsie, that they might be layin' for us, does it?" Rattler replied. "The instinct o' a hunter and Ingin-fighter are ruther infantile in your noggin', ar'n't they, pard? You can deceive and cheat others outen their eyes, but ye can't penetrate the deception o' others more'n a blind robbin. Them fellers over there can see us, as easy as we can them, but—Great Rosycrusians!"

The old hunter's exclamation was followed by

others from Bandy and Little Fury, for all beheld a dozen clouds of white, frothy smoke burst from the bushes on the opposite slope, and heard the crash of a dozen rifles roll across the valley.

The yell of dismay that instantly burst from the lips of the savages, mingled with cries of agony, told that the camp had been surprised. The whole party seemed thrown into dire confusion that would have ended in a panic but for the prompt action of Black Dog and his white confederates.

A defiant yell followed the report of the rifles from the hillside, and then a dozen men dressed in miners' garbs and led by a man whom Little Fury recognized, despite the distance, as Harry Vaughn, of Red Ruin, charged from the bushes straight toward the excited foe.

"Boys!" exclaimed Tom Rattler, springing to his feet, "a fight's on and here goes for a hand in it!"

The old man bounded off down the slope, the vigor and elasticity of youth infused into his body by the sound of battle.

Bandy was off as quick with a yell that was heard by the attacking party and the foe above the reverberating thunder of the battle; while Little Fury went fairly flying over rocks and bushes so lightly and swiftly that his feet hardly touched the earth.

Reaching the valley Old Tom and the boy dashed across it and hurled themselves into the thickest of the battle, which by this time was raging fiercely at the base of the slope, while Kit Bandy, spying the captive girl standing alone, took the desperate chances of reaching her.

But the old detective's movement was discovered by Black Dog, who, calling off four of his warriors, sent them to intercept the old man, ordering them to take him alive that he might die at the stake.

Captain Trojan also saw Kit running toward the girl and joined the warriors in the race to intercept him. But, swift as the five were, and with the advantage at the start, Bandy reached the girl first, but not in time to sever the thongs that were about her ankles.

Whirling around he met the oncoming foe with a shot from his revolver that dropped a savage, but before he could fire again the others were upon him and a terrible conflict ensued. A whirlpool of struggling, writhing forms and flying limbs was set in motion on that spot. Round and round, over and over they spun and whirled—now close together, then opening out as the desperate old man beat off his foes like a wounded lion dashing aside a pack of ravenous wolves.

But again and again the red-skins and the outlaw, obeying the mandate of their chief to take him alive, closed in upon him, and again and again he flung them off and struck them down, having no weapons now but his fists, his prodigious strength and superhuman courage. And, despite the odds against him, he was in a fair way to victory when that miserable wretch, Socorro Dan, came to the rescue of his friends and felled the old detective half-stunned by a cowardly blow from behind.

The moment the Desert Vulture recognized the old man he was for shooting him then and there, but being informed of the chief's orders he turned away with a muttered curse.

In the mean time, the main battle down the canyon had been fought to a finish, with no decided victory on either side.

Harry Vaughn's plans had been to fire upon the savages, and then, before they could recover from their surprise, charge with a yell upon them and put them to rout. Should they fail in this, and the foe turn to give battle, the miners were to quickly fall back among the rocks and bushes and there give battle where they could have the advantage of cover. To their regret they were forced to pursue the latter course. The savages rallied quickly, and, seeing the inferior number of the whites, discharged their guns and rushed with drawn tomahawks upon them, some of the outlaws in the lead.

Hastily falling back among the bushes and rocks that fringed the base of the slope, the miners turned and opened with their revolvers, and the struggle soon became a hand-to-hand conflict.

The red-skins came on and charged into the bushes, but there they were met, square in the face, by one volley after another, with such frightful rapidity that they were staggered by the shock and recoiled before the flaming tubes, recovered and advanced again, hurling knives and tomahawks at the heads of the intrepid foe. Again were they met by a withering volley,

and as they recoiled this time, Old Tom Rattler uttered a yell of defiance and like an enraged tiger bounded from the bushes with clubbed rifle and attacked them. And thus fighting like an infuriated madman, he fell under the blow of a flying tomahawk. A red-skin rushed forward, knife in hand, to scalp him, when a shot from Little Fury's revolver crashed through his brain and he fell dead, his fingers clutched in the old man's scanty locks.

For the third time the savages advanced into the bushes with a demoniac yell, but more deadly than ever came the bullets of the whites, and with a cry of dismay they fled from the field and took refuge behind the projecting point of rock heretofore mentioned.

The battle had ended, the savages had run, but upon the whole it was a terrible defeat for Harry Vaughn and his party.

CHAPTER XIV.

A VAILED WOMAN.

THREE of the miners and Old Tom Rattler had fallen under the blows of the red-skins, and three had been severely wounded, while scarcely a man escaped without some slight injury from the enemy's flying weapons.

So precipitate had been the retreat of the savages that they left their dead—of whom there were at least fifteen, including three outlaws—where they had fallen; and yet, so severely had the whites suffered that they dare not follow up their victory, put the foe to rout and reap the reward of their valor by rescuing the maiden, and Bandy, who, they could now see from where they stood, was also a prisoner.

Fearing the savages might attempt a flank movement Little Fury hurried up the slope to a point whence he could watch their movements. He saw Socorro Dan and Captain Trojan endeavoring to rally them behind the spit of rock, but they were thoroughly panic-stricken, and continued their retreat up the canyon to where Black Dog and two warriors stood guarding Bandy and the girl.

Reaching the chief the outlaws tried their persuasive powers on him in hopes of having the attack renewed, but when the chief looked upon his decimated ranks and heard the groans of his wounded followers, he declined to make further sacrifice.

Seeing the foe retiring up the canyon Little Fury returned and reported the fact to his friends, and while the little party stood discussing the situation, their attention was suddenly attracted by an angry exclamation from a point a rod or two in front of them.

Hastening to see what it meant they were filled with profound joy and surprise to see Tom Rattler was alive, yet startled by sight of the old man engaged in a struggle with a dead savage whose fingers, rigid in death, were tightly clutched in the old man's hair.

"Let go, you varlet, or I'll pound the face off'n ye, ye stupid bellyon!" the old hunter exclaimed, emphasizing each word with an overhanded blow on the dead warrior's face.

The sight was as shocking as it was amusing, and Little Fury, seeing how matters stood, ran to his friend's assistance, calling out:

"Hold on, Tom! that varmint's stone dead! I shot him when he was in the act of scalping you!"

The boy found the hunter's locks so tightly clutched in the red-skin's stiffening fingers that he was compelled to use his knife before he could liberate his old friend. When free, Old Tom, with a big knot on his head where the flat side of a flying hatchet had struck him, sprung to his feet and gazing in bewilderment about him, inquired:

"Who whipped, Whirlwind? Where's Old Kitsie?"

"We were whipped," answered Harry Vaughn, "but the enemy run. Your friend, Bandy, was taken prisoner in his effort to rescue that girl."

"Poor Ole Kit!" sighed the hunter, rubbing his bruised and aching head, "I'm afraid it'll go hard with him—wusser than it did with me; but say, boys, how long 've I been strewn 'round here?"

"An hour, at least," "Great Rosycrusians!" exclaimed the old man, "a dead loss o' sixty minutes. Wal, wal; I must make that up some way; but ah, me! Tom Rattler can't fight like he once could, men."

"Then you must have been a holy snorter," declared Jack Thompson, one of Vaughn's party, "for you cut a wide hole in them red-skins' ranks—you and Little Fury."

"Thanks, pard," returned the hunter: "I'll admit thar's some fight in me yit, and till Old

Kit and that gal are rescued I'll let every drap o' it out in their behalf. What are you goin' to do, men?"

"What can we do?" asked Vaughn; "the odds are too great for us since half our force has been killed and wounded."

"Stratagem, boys, stratagem, as Kitsie says, is our only hope. Oh, if we had that ole buccaneer, what a host we'd be. But, men, every minute is precious. Let's get to work."

Acting upon this suggestion, the party proceeded to bury their dead, then decided upon their plans for the future, which were as follows:

Little Fury was to follow the retreating foe to watch that the captives were not spirited away from the main party, while Old Rattler was to lead the miners across the hills and endeavor to head off the foe at a point known as Sand Basin.

Joe Runnells, who had been too badly wounded to go further, was left in charge of the two men who were down. They were assisted to a little cave or pocket under a great rock about a mile from the battle-field where there was a spring. The pocket was well hidden from view by bushes and vines, and there the wounded men were left to await their return.

Runnells had been provided with all the firearms left on the field by the dead and wounded of both sides, so that he was in good condition, so far as weapons went, to defend himself and friends. However, he apprehended no immediate danger. His greatest fears were of the safety of his friends that were absent.

Hour after hour dragged wearily by. The sun was half-way down the western sky when he suddenly heard the ring of hooved feet coming up the canyon. Parting the bushes, he peered through. To his great surprise he saw a woman galloping toward him upon a horse, or rather a pony, which he readily recognized as that of Little Fury.

Rising, the wounded miner stepped out into view. As he did so, the woman drew her veil over her face as if to prevent her being recognized by him.

Coming on, the woman drew rein a few paces from Runnells, in apparent excitement, for before she had scarcely stopped her horse, she asked:

"Sir, are you not one of the Red Ruin miners?"

"I am, madam," responded Runnells, "but who under heavens are you?"

"It matters not," she replied; "I wish to see Mayor Vaughn."

"For what?"

"I have a message for him," the woman answered, still keeping her face concealed: "Miss Florence Walworth was carried off last night—kidnapped. Can you tell me where I can find Mayor Vaughn?"

Runnells told her—told her of the fight a few hours before, and the dangers that lay before her in the canyon, and begged of her to go no further.

"I have no fears," was the answer she gave.

"Then you must be mad," declared Runnells, "who are you? and whence did you come? I recognize the pony you ride. Surely you are not from Red Ruin!"

"I'm a stranger to you," she replied, preparing to depart, "and must not tarry here longer."

"My dear madam," said Runnells, "whoever you may be, I cannot permit you to go further—into certain danger and perhaps death. You're excited, madam."

He advanced, put out his hand to take hold of the bridle-rein, when the woman quickly whipped out a revolver, pointed it at the miner's breast saying, in a tone not to be misunderstood:

"Do not detain me on your peril!"

Runnells stepped back, and the veiled woman galloped on.

CHAPTER XV.

A WOMAN THAT WASN'T VAILED.

KIT BANDY's hands were securely tied at his back and then two warriors with tomahawks in hand detailed to stand guard over him, for Black Dog had been led to believe that the old man possessed some mysterious, wizard power that would assert itself if left unguarded for a moment.

Socorro Dan was thrown into an ecstasy of brutal joy over the old detective's capture. He clinked together the iron bracelets on his wrists in Bandy's face; he foretold the pleasure he should take in seeing the great and original Bandy perishing miserably at the stake. In fact, the villain was for executing the prisoner.

then and there; but Black Dog informed him that the entertainment would not come off until they halted for night at the springs in Sand Basin, when they would have more time to apply a slow torture. It was the savage's belief that he could make the prisoner suffer as many deaths as he had had warriors slain, and by so doing the spirits of the slain would be appeased.

Having no desire to again try conclusions with the whites, whom they believed to be in great numbers in the bushes, they made all haste to depart through fear of an attack.

The captive maiden was again seated upon her rude and open palanquin, the wounded were placed upon hastily-improvised litters, with one exception: this was a little half-breed Indian, who was lashed upon Kit Bandy's back even against the wounded wretch's own protest.

Then the march began, a rear guard having been detailed to prevent surprise by pursuers.

A forced march of several miles was made before stopping. It was almost sultry warm in the canyon despite the almost continuous shade. The perspiration rolled in huge drops from Bandy's brow, but without a murmur, with firm tread, and unfailing strength, the redoubtable old man moved on with his detested burden.

Finally they came to a spring and stopped to slake their thirst and change litter-bearers.

While there the scouts came in and reported no enemy in pursuit.

"I think," said Captain Trojan, "there's not enough of them to follow. I believe most of the outfit was killed."

"Yes," said Socorro Dan surlily, "I think it was a mistake we didn't go back and finish the rest of them."

"Yes," replied Trojan, in an undertone, "but you see, Black Dog can't see enough in this expedition to risk any more lives. When prevailed on to come over here and help back our scheme, he expected some scalps and plunder, and instead of these he's got nothin'—but some o' his warriors killed. I think he would feel amply repaid, however, if he could have that girl—"

"He'll not be repaid, then," broke in the Desert Vulture, "for she is mine exclusively; but then, we want to keep on good terms with the savage until we're safe."

During the halt Kit Bandy had a fair sight of the captive. She was not over eighteen, with dark blue eyes and a face decidedly fair despite the impress of fear and suffering upon it.

The retreat was about to be resumed when the attention of all was attracted by the sudden appearance of a strange woman who rode out of a narrow defile on the right. She was a white woman and mounted upon a lean, long-legged mule that seemed weary with travel.

Everything else was forgotten for the time being in the excitement consequent upon this woman's arrival.

Old Kit Bandy was heard to utter a groan when his eyes fell upon her face.

Without the least hesitancy or sign of fear, the woman rode straight toward the party, and as she approached she was observed to be a woman of years, with a sharp, wrinkled face, and gray hair hanging low upon her forehead. She wore a dress of doubtful color and a faded green sun-bonnet.

An old gaunt carpet-bag and a lariat hung from the horn of her saddle. A blanket or two was rolled up and fastened behind. Across her lap lay an old umbrella.

The amazed red-skins and outlaws stood still as she rode up. They saw her eyes fixed upon some one in the party as if held by a sort of fascination, and when Black Dog finally stepped forward and was about to speak to her, she uttered a startled shriek that was a commingling of joy and rage, leaped to the ground and darted past the chief to where Kit Bandy sat, and raising her umbrella brought it down upon the bowed head of the old detective at the same time giving utterance to her feelings in the exclamation:

"At last! at last!"

She would have dealt the already suffering old man a second blow had Captain Trojan not interfered.

"Old lady, what do you mean by this dash into our midst?" the outlaw asked. "Do you know that smooth-faced old sinner, Kit Bandy?"

"Why shouldn't I?" retorted the woman, her eyes snapping and her vinegary old face livid with passion; "why shouldn't I know Kit Bandy when he's my lawfully-wedded, legalized husband?"

"So-ho!" exclaimed Captain Trojan, turning to Kit, "so, then, Bandy, you're a married man?"

To the utmost surprise of those who heard him, Bandy looked up and in a voice of calm resignation said:

"Yes, that's my wife; go on with my torture. It's death, anyhow."

"Don't worry, old man; you're down for a savage roast," Trojan rejoined.

"Men!" exclaimed Mrs. Bandy, "do you mean to kill my husband?"

"You're as good as a widow, madam," Socorro Dan answered.

"Oh, Heaven forbid!" wailed the woman.

"For months have I journeyed over mountain and plain in search of my recreant husband who deserted my bed and board without cause or provocation; and now that I have found him, is it only to learn that my labors and sufferings have been for nothin'? Oh, good chief! spare my husband, and receive the eternal blessing of Sabina Bandy!"

This appeal to the chief had little effect on the stoical savage, who shook his head, saying:

"He must die. He has slain many of my warriors. If he would live let him give back in life the lives he and his friends slew, then shall he go free."

"That you know he cannot do, great chief!" cried Sabina, wringing her bony hands.

"Then he must die," declared the chief; "let the white squaw go back to her people with her sorrow."

And as he spoke thus, the chief turned and walked away.

Socorro Dan followed him, and thus addressed him:

"Black Dog, do not let that woman depart. She has seen the white girl in your camp, and will bring trouble and dangers upon us."

"The Desert Vulture's head is wise," the chief replied, struck with the force of the outlaw's advice; "she shall go with us."

"Better slit her old throat," was the Vulture's brutal suggestion.

"Black Dog," said the chief, with an indignant look, "does not war on old squaws!"

Socorro Dan turned away, justly rebuked. The chief walked back to the distressed woman and said:

"The white squaw must go with us, but her husband will die to-night."

"If you will not spare his life, then I am even thankful for the privilege of following him to his grave!" the woman sobbed.

"Then bounce on your steed, Mrs. Bandy," said Socorro Dan, "and if you've no objections, we'd like to seat that young lady there behind you, providin' your mule'll permit it."

"Birdie will carry double," said the woman, leading her mule up to a stone from which she sprang into her saddle.

"Then understand," said the outlaw, "that you're not to converse one word with the girl under penalty of havin' to walk with me."

"Don't fear, you monster! my heart's too full of grief to talk, as no doubt that poor child's is, also."

The captive girl was placed behind Sabina, the patient "Birdie" submitting quietly to her double burden. Then, to the amusement of the red-skins, Captain Trojan took the lariat from the woman's saddle, made a slip-noose on one end and threw it over Kit's neck; the other end he made fast to the mule's tail.

"Now forward, march!" shouted Trojan, "and remember, old woman, if you undertake to ride away you'll choke your husband to death."

Amid yells of savage delight the procession moved on, an Indian leading the mule.

Patiently and with unfaltering step Kit Bandy tramped along behind the mule, his burden still upon his back.

Never, since the Son of Man marched up Calvary bearing his cross, has any man received more jeers, scoffs and revilings than did the Old Mountain Detective during that long and weary march up Crow Wing Canyon that sultry afternoon.

Socorro Dan and his white friends expected to see him sink under his burden. But he was a man that nearly half a century of active life on the frontier had inured to hardships and privations. He defied the very laws of nature in that he could go days and nights without food or sleep and yet feel little the worse of it. His endurance was phenomenal. Most of his captors were leg-weary and footsore without burdens, while he seemed tireless; and it was with an exclamation of joy from the lips of the outlaws that the party finally entered Sand Basin, where their travels for the day were to end.

Sand Basin was a level, park-like opening of several thousand acres in area, surrounded by

precipitous bluffs and tall, needle-like rocks that reared their lofty heads into the sky. It evidently had once been the bottom of a lake, for it was nothing but a bed of sand and gravel interspersed with small shells. It was entirely devoid of grass, but covered thickly with sage-brush. A few clumps of willows grew to in the immediate vicinity of a spring near the center of the basin. This spring, proper, was simply a wet spot in the sand six or eight rods square. By digging down anywhere within this moist spot a couple feet or more, water, good and pure, could be obtained—a phenomenon that exists among the sand-hills of Colorado.

Leaving two red-skins to watch the entrance to the basin, the party pushed on to the spring over a mile away.

It was nearly dusk when the camping-ground was finally reached, and the march for that day ended.

Bandy's burden was removed from his back, and then, while Socorro Dan was assisting the captive girl to dismount, the old detective stepped forward to the side of the mule and said:

"Sabina, you'll be spared sights o' misery and horror not to stop here to-night."

"Hullo!" exclaimed Captain Trojan, "the old man begins to weaken!"

"Oh, Christopher!" sobbed Sabina, leaning over in her saddle, and laying her hand on Kit's head in a caressing way, "must we part ag'in and forever?"

As she spoke, Kit slightly crouched as if half expecting a blow to follow her caressing touch, and the next instant he shot up four feet in the air, and as he came down, Sabina, who had transferred her hand to the collar of his coat, jerked him face downward across her lap.

So quick was this done that before a hand could be raised—before those, whose eyes were on the old man, could even comprehend what had been done—Sabina uttered a shriek, and like a tiger the mule darted forward, knocking over and trampling on the savage in front, and then swept away like an arrow, Old Kit hanging over Sabina's lap like a pair of saddle-bags and yelling like a demon.

"We're tricked!" cried Socorro Dan, with a frightful oath, whipping out his revolver. "Fire! fire on the slippery devils!"

More than fifty shots were fired at the flying couple, but by this time the fugitives were beyond pistol range, and the yell of defiance they sent back told they were unharmed.

Like so many hounds freed of the leash, Indians and outlaws dashed away en masse in pursuit of the couple. They did not stop to consider the advantages the fugitives had in being mounted. It was not so dark but that they could see the fleeing forms above the sage-brush, and after a dash of twenty rods or so, the distance between them seemed diminished, and this encouraged them to continue the chase.

Suddenly, however, Socorro Dan remembered that the captive girl had been left alone with the wounded men, and fearing she might escape, he turned and ran back.

He found her, however, in charge of a red-skin who had been but slightly wounded, and nearly out of breath he sat down to rest.

A second red-skin was busy lighting a fire with fuel brought from the canyon, and soon the place was lit up with a cheery glow.

Then Socorro Dan, having got his wind, burst forth in a torrent of rage, and the terrible anathemas he heaped upon Bandy and his wife, himself and friends for permitting themselves to be outwitted at the last moment, sent a shudder to the captive girl's heart. And while the desperado was at the very white-heat of his rage—while his red and white friends could still be heard howling like demons down the basin, a tall, gaunt figure suddenly sprang from the shadows of a clump of sagebrush, and with an uplifted club bounded into the radius of light.

Socorro Dan's lips were paralyzed with an oath half uttered at sight of the figure, for he saw, to his horror, it was that of Kit Bandy, the Mountain Detective!

CHAPTER XVI.

"RICHARD HIMSELF AGAIN."

SURPRISED in his rage by the sudden appearance of Kit Bandy within the radius of light, Socorro Dan started back and threw up his hand as if stricken by a bolt of lightning. But it was fear that staggered him—the fear of Bandy's uplifted club which finally fell upon his head with a crash, and like an ox in the shambles he sunk down in the sand, a quivering heap.

Scarcely slackening his speed the old detective swept on to the nearest savage, and then to the next, beating them down as he went, until one able to raise his head lay prone upon the earth. Then turning to the terrified captive in a voice as kindly as his work had been swift and terrible:

"There, thank the Lord! I hope your sufferin' has 'bout ended, my little woman. Trust it, me an' I'll have you away from here before them varmints get back."

The old man turned and picked up a blanket that lay near, lifted a revolver from Socorro Dan's belt, then returning to the girl, drew her arm in his and started off.

Bandy headed for the north side of Sand Basin, and not a word passed between him and the girl until they had reached the shadows of the nearest bluff nearly two miles from the Indian camp.

"Here we'll rest awhile, miss," the old detective said; "that was quite a walk for you."

"Mr. Bandy," the girl said, speaking for the first time, "you must pardon my silence, for it seems I have been dreaming the last hour. I could hardly believe that I was out of those dreadful savages' power; but now that I know I am, I thank God that so brave and heroic a man as Kit Bandy is permitted to live."

"Thanks for the nice compliment, Miss Walworth," the old man said, determined to settle at once the girl's identity.

"Then you know who I am?" the girl quickly responded.

"I merely guessed at it, miss; and so I'm right, eh?"

"Yes, sir," she answered; "I am Florence Walworth. I was taken from the stage-coach a few days ago by road-agents and carried away."

"Yes, I mistrusted as much," Bandy said. "Do you remember the old tramp, Sol Soaker, who held up the coach first and then got aboard with the driver? that war me. But do you know another girl took your place in the coach, dressed up in some o' your clothes?"

"There was a young girl in the bushes where I was taken, and to her was given my duster, hat and veil," Florence Walworth replied; "but I thought she was a captive like myself. Indeed, I was so terrified that I fainted away soon after I was taken into the bushes, and how long it was before I recovered I know not. The girl I have not seen since."

"Wal, that gal is now passing as Florence Walworth in Red Ruin, and the heiress o' the Jolly Jane Mine. It's as I mistrusted, a devilish conspiracy to steal your father's interest in the Jolly Jane!"

"Then that is why my poor father was murdered!" the maiden sobbed, "and why I am here!"

"Yes, but the murderers will soon be brought to justice," the old man assured her, "and while your father cannot be restored to life, his property shall not be stolen from his child. Judge Lynch's got lots o' work to do 'round this hornets' nest o' road-agents, assassins and royal hellyons, ginerally. In forty years among the mines and frontier settlements I never struck a wuss mess than I've been into the past week. But I think the worst's over with now."

"Oh! I hope so, for your sake, for you have suffered much to-day. Oh! how I did wish I could bear some of your burden when we were coming up that dreary canyon. But, oh! pardon me, Mr. Bandy; I had forgotten to inquire about your poor, old, heart-broken wife."

Old Kit laughed softly.

"Miss Walworth," he said, "Sabina Bandy's not a woman, but a man in female attire—one o' the bravest little ole foxes that ever tricked a red-skin. Ichabod Flea can play the wronged wife to perfection, can't he?"

"Yes, indeed," replied the maiden, feeling much relieved, "quite as well as Mr. Kit Bandy can play Salvation Sam."

Again Kit indulged in a silent laugh.

"I reckon that seemed wicked to you, Miss Florence," he said—"like makin' light o' sacred things, eh?"

"No, Mr. Bandy," she replied; "but for your singing and your sermon, every word of which I heard, I should have died that night in prison. It was a noble sermon, I assure you."

"Thank you, miss," Kit said;—"but, hark! I hear the sound o' battle over to the north-west."

From the point near where Crow Wing Canyon entered Sand Basin going south, came the report of fire-arms mingled with Indian yells; but the noise soon subsided, and all remained quiet for several minutes when triumphant savage yelling suddenly burst forth at a point

midway between the entrance to the canyon and the Indian camp. This was kept up, though it drifted along in the direction of the camp where it finally ended in what appeared to be one grand demonstration of savage triumph.

"Somethin' goin' on over thar, the way them varlets are rejoicing," said Old Kit; "and I'm afraid some o' our friends has fallen into their murderous hands, for I know we've friends in the hills. They wasn't all killed in the battle, else them red-skins wouldn't 'a' left as they did. In fact, the Ingins war whipped, but why our friends didn't foller up the foe, I can't say. Horn o' Joshua! if Little Fury should fall into their hands, they'd roast him alive!"

"Little Fury, did you say?" queried Florence.

"Yes'm."

"That is the person my father wrote would meet me at Leadville, if he did not go himself."

"The conspirators headed him off, and tried to capture, then kill him; but the boy outginted the hull gang. Oh! but he's a dashin', gamey youth! It'll be sure death to him if he's in 'em red devil's clutches."

"Mr. Bandy," said the girl, "leave me where you think I will be safe and, if you so desire, go learn what those dreadful savages and robbers are now up to."

"Gal, you're an unselfish little heroine, by the horn o' Joshua! I can trust to your nerve and splendid, cool judgment, for one that can think o' other's welfare arter goin' thro' what you have can't be scart at her shader. So I'll take you at your word and run over and reconnoiter that Ingin camp. I'll not be gone long, and, for your sake, take no chances. Here, put this blanket round you, gal, and keep off the chill air."

And the old man placed the blanket he had brought from the Indian camp over the maiden's head and shoulders, and then conducted her to the base of one of those tall pillars of rock impinging on the Basin.

In under a projecting ledge, skirted in front by a growth of bushes and vines, where the darkness was impenetrable by the eye, there he seated the maiden, saying:

"This are a dandy hidin'-place, Miss Walworth, and if you'll jist keep quiet, no Ingin 'll find you. If I should be gone a leetle over time, don't worry. If you should hear footsteps along here don't take it for granted they're mine, for it's likely Ingin scouts 'll be on the move. When I return I will come to where you first stooped to pass under here and rap three times on the rock with my revolver or somethin', then you can come out. Now be brave and keep up your courage and all will be well."

With these kind words of advice and assurance the old man departed in the direction of the Indian camp.

He had been gone scarcely five minutes when the girl's ears were greeted by a low, gentle voice near her, saying:

"Florence Walworth?"

The girl's heart almost ceased to beat as she listened—not in fear, but a vague uncertainty as to whether she had in reality heard her name whispered or was laboring under a delusion produced by the almost overwhelming silence that brooded around her.

Full a minute or two elapsed, when all her doubts were set at rest. Again she heard the voice—a low, gentle voice, which she intuitively recognized as that of a woman—say, distinctly:

"Florence Walworth, have no fear. I am Jeannette Colville, and your friend, Florence!"

CHAPTER XVII.

JEANNETTE'S REPENTANCE.

FLORENCE WALWORTH was not a little surprised to find that she was not the only female in that desolate place. It was so dark that she could merely see the faintest outlines of the woman, and yet no thought of danger from her ever entered the girl's mind. On the contrary, she was attracted toward the stranger through sympathy, for in her low, gentle voice Florence detected a deep tinge of sadness, and at once responded:

"In Heaven's name! whence came you?"

"From Red Ruin camp," responded the stranger.

"And you know me—you addressed me by name," Florence remarked.

"I heard Kit Bandy call you Florence Walworth, and Florence Walworth of all others, but one, have I longed to see," the woman replied. "As I told you, my name is Jeannette Colville. I am a young girl like yourself, but, oh! so miserable! so distressed!"

"This is sad, indeed, Miss Colville," Florence said, in a sympathetic tone.

"But when you have heard my story, Florence, you will not pity me; I have wronged you."

"Wronged me?" exclaimed Florence.

"Yes," answered Jeannette; "you remember the girl that was in the bushes the day you were taken from the coach?"

"Yes; then you are that girl?" exclaimed Florence.

"I am, and I took my place in that coach as Florence Walworth, and as Florence Walworth have I been passing myself in Red Ruin."

"Then, Jeannette," exclaimed Florence, with a nervous start, "you are a friend of the outlaws!"

"Hear me through, Florence," begged Jeannette, half-sobbing, "hear my story before you hate me—drive me from your presence! I admit I have sinned against you, but I now desire to make all the amends possible. It was through evil influences and falsehood that I ever stooped to do what I did."

"As you say, I am, or have been, the friend of the outlaws known as Trojan's Band. My father was one of them. Two years ago he was a miner at Leadville, but he was not prosperous, and mother dying, he drifted into the company of bad men. I mistrusted he was engaged in evil work, and finally learned from his own lips that he was one of Trojan's Band of road-agents. At first I was tempted to expose him, but I knew if I did the Vigilantes would kill him, and so I kept quiet."

"While we lived at Leadville I met and became acquainted with the son of a miner, who is now known as Little Fury. Frank Fewry was a brave, kind-hearted boy, and I not only liked him, but I loved him. He came now and then to our cabin, but father did not look with favor on his visits, for Frank was as honest as he was brave, and he—my father—was afraid I would inadvertently expose him to Frank. Father knew I loved Frank, and it displeased him very much."

"But one day Frank went away. The miners of Red Ruin hired him to act as scout for them. He came to see me before he went away and told me where he was going."

"About six months ago father told me he was going to move up into the mountains, not far from Red Ruin, and go to mining. In hopes of seeing Frank I was eager to go, and when I was taken into my new home, I found it a great cavern in the rocks, and the headquarters of the Trojan Band of outlaws!"

"I soon learned that one of the band called 'Ajax' was a miner in Red Ruin—your father's partner in the Jolly Jane. His true name is David Luce. It seems your father never suspected him of being an outlaw, and thinking a great deal of him confided many things to him; and when through him—your father—the band learned of your coming, the plot was laid to rob you and your father of your interest in the Jolly Jane. I was to be substituted in your place as the daughter of John Walworth."

"I opposed the whole conspiracy and fought bitterly against it. They assured me no murder was to be committed, and that no danger would befall me if I would just carry out the part assigned me. Still I stood firm, and as a last resort I was told that Little Fury was in the plot. I wanted to see him, but was told he lay with a broken leg in Red Ruin, and I was forbidden going to him. But one day a note was brought me said to be from Little Fury. It confirmed the statement of his being in the plot, and begged me to help their plans out. The letter was a forgery, but I was foolish enough to believe it true, and at last yielded to the influence of evil, anxious to get to Red Ruin."

"But no sooner had I got into the plot than I learned that John Walworth had been murdered, and that Little Fury was not in Red Ruin with a broken leg. Then I made up my mind that he had been murdered, also; and, although duly installed in your father's cabin as Florence Walworth, I made up my mind that I would no longer play a part in the conspiracy into which I had been led by forgery; a last night I took Little Fury's pony out of stable and fled the camp. Before leaving, I ever, I left a note in the cabin which led the miners to think I had been ably and carried away to be held for ransom—object in doing so was to conceal my poses from 'Ajax' and his friend, Little Fury. I was determined to learn the fate of Little Fury if possible. I made my way out of the night, and finally, 'Dio—old Trojan Band cave. There

mede,' one of the gang, dying from the effects of a wound inflicted by Little Fury!"

"Indeed? Oh! how dreadful!" exclaimed the astounded Florence.

"Oh! how glad I was to hear of Little Fury being alive!" Jeannette went on; "but the next minute my joy was overwhelmed in grief by the news of my father's death by a little landslide."

"When I heard this, I resolved to expose the whole wicked conspiracy, and told Diomedes so. The dying man then told me all he knew of the plot, and how it was working. He told me that a band of miserable Indians was in the canyon, brought there, through the influence of Socorro Dan, to aid the Trojan Band should assistance be required. I learned that you were in the Indian camp, and that you were to be given into the power of Socorro Dan as his share in the plot. He was to take you far over into the mountains and keep you there as his wife."

"Oh, my God! is this all possible?" cried Florence, with a shudder.

"Every word is true," declared Jeannette; "but as soon as I had heard Diomedes's story, I resolved to save you from that great villain's power if it cost me my life. So I rode on after the Indians."

"Down in the canyon I came upon a wounded miner who told me his friends had had a battle with the Indians who were ahead of me. He endeavored to detain me, but I rode on. The trail was well-known to me. I had been over it twice, and knew all the stopping-places along the way."

"I was almost certain the Indians would stop over night in Sand Basin, and taking a pass that entered the basin north of Crow Wing Canyon, I reached here half an hour or so ago. I had ridden hard and my pony was nearly exhausted. I left him at grass back in a little valley beyond this bluff. I heard yelling across toward the spring and came around here to listen, and near here was I concealed when you and Kit Bandy came up."

"I heard your conversation, and from this I learned who you were; and how my heart leaped with joy when I learned you had escaped. Now this is my story in brief. I confess I have sinned against you—lent my aid to a wicked scheme that robbed us both of our fathers. I sincerely hope your suffering has ended; but as for me, it has just begun. Little Fury will despise me, nor can I blame him. I have no one—no home to turn to. Oh, my God! it is a terrible condition for me—a young girl to be in! I know not what is to become of me!"

"Jeannette, my poor girl," said Florence, laying her hand upon the weeping girl's arm, "you have been more sinned against than sinning! Wait till Mr. Bandy returns and hears your story, and I know he will say, as I do, that you are to be pitied, not punished; and we will see that you are cared for and befriended."

Jeannette made no reply, but sat and sobbed most bitterly. Presently the girl started up saying, half-bitterly:

"I do not deserve sympathy from any one, Florence, least of all of you; but—Ah! what light is that coming this way across the basin?"

Florence started with a little cry, for the light alluded to could be seen not over sixty rods away and appeared to be coming directly toward them.

Jeannette arose and, parting the bushes that she might get a better view, watched the light a few moments, then exclaimed:

"Florence Walworth, that light is a torch carried by Indians, and they are tracking you and Kit Bandy across the basin to this very spot. You are in peril!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

POOR, BRAVE JEANNETTE!

"Oh! what shall we do?" cried Florence, when acquainted with the new danger threatening her.

"Stay right here until your friend Bandy returns, as he requested you. I will thwart those Indians, for awhile, at least. Give me your wraps, your hat and veil—exchange with me gain—that I may deceive them—pass for Florence Walworth once more!"

Scarcely aware of what she was doing, and ignorant of what Jeannette meant to do, Florence exchanged those articles of wearing-ap with the girl.

Jeannette then took her by the hand, spoke a few well words to her, and then departed. She gazed toward the approaching light the while, her way fast as her feet could carry her.

Pr she stopped and crouched behind a

sage-bush. She remained there until the savages were within ten feet of her when she sprung to her feet with a feigned cry of terror and fled.

The red-skins gave a yell and started in pursuit, soon overtaking her. When the chase began the torch was dropped and extinguished, so that they could not see her face but, naturally supposing she was the girl they were after, her recapture was announced by a triumphant yell that was heard and answered at camp. But when the warriors reached the light with their captive, and found their mistake, their feathers fell, and the yells and jeers of derision that greeted them were deafening.

At sight of Jeannette's face the outlaws were for a moment struck dumb.

The maiden glanced at the forms lying, sitting and standing around. Her eyes fell upon one lying upon his back, his arms and limbs outstretched and tied to stakes driven into the ground. It required no second look to tell the maiden that it was the form of *Little Fury, the young scout!*

With a cry of anguish she ran to where he lay and dropping upon her knees at his side, looked down into his face to see if he were alive. The boy recognized her and spoke her name.

Socorro Dan, who had recovered from Old Kit's blow so as to be able to sit up, turned his bandaged head and with an oath addressed Captain Trojan as follows:

"Trojan, what is that young, wild-eyed wench doing here?"

"You tell!" was the outlaw chief's response.

"Find out! find out!" exclaimed the Desert Vulture glancing around him as uneasily as if he was expecting Kit Bandy to rise up before him at any moment.

Trojan walked over to Jeannette, and grasping her by the arm lifted her to her feet, demanding:

"Jeannette Colville—I mean Florence Walworth—what the deuce are you doing here? Why aren't you at home—in Red Ruin?"

Jeannette's sorrow and grief changed suddenly to indignation and rage, and confronting the outlaw with flashing eyes, fairly hissed:

"Ask me that, will you, Bill Trojan, after deceiving me as you all have? Where is my father? where is John Walworth? where is his daughter? You told me there was to be no murder! You told me Frank Fewry was in your devilish plot! Why is he there?"

"Black Dog wants to roast him," was Trojan's brutal reply; "he's been shootin' some of the chief's warriors."

"Yes, you have deceived Black Dog, too!" the girl went on, "and coaxed him over here that you might throw upon him some of your crimes! Oh, what a fool have I been!"

"And are yit," declared Trojan turning to Socorro Dan, and continuing: "you see, Dan, what we've done by takin' a silly, fool girl into our great 'Jolly Jane scheme.' Tell me, now, where our dividends will come in? After all our careful planning, fightin', and the loss of four of our stockholders in the landslide, at the hands of Kit Bandy, and in battle—at a time when we felt almost sure of success—up pops the central figure—the heiress—in Sand Basin to blast all our hopes and snivel over that blasted boy!"

"She'll regret it the longest day she lives!" exclaimed Socorro Dan; "I hope Black Dog 'll roast the boy before her eyes!"

"Villain! desperado!" cried Jeannette, who had heard his cruel threat and brutal hope, "you are a coward! You and Bill Trojan are base-born cowards!"

"All the same," answered Trojan, "I'm the only friend you've got left now, Miss Jeannette."

"I scorn your friendship!" she exclaimed; "I prefer the friendship and protection of Black Dog, if he is an Indian!"

Black Dog heard the girl's remark and it pleased his savage vanity and touched his savage pride, and turning to the girl he said, with the air of one whose word is law:

"If the White Rose seeks the friendship and protection of Black Dog, she shall have both!"

"Thank you, chief," the girl replied in a hopeful tone, "then I ask for your friendship and protection."

"Let the White Rose but speak and her wish will be obeyed," the flattered chief responded.

"In anything, Black Dog?" the girl quickly asked.

"Look sharp, Black Dog!" yelled out Socorro Dan, "she's a cunnin' she-fox, and 'll trip you up. She's goin' to ask you to release Little Fury."

"That she must not ask," Black Dog said. "The young pale-face has killed many of my warriors. He must die!"

"Oh, Black Dog!" pleaded the girl, "save him, Black Dog, and I will forever bless you—ay, save him—give him his life and liberty, and I will be your humble slave!"

As the poor girl made this desperate appeal to the chief who stood gazing down into her beautiful face and pleading eyes, a look, not of sympathy or compassion, but of a vulture regarding its prey, passed over the savage's broad sensual face, and a lustful gleam flashed in his eyes, as he responded:

"The White Rose is very fair. She would make bright the lodge of Black Dog. She will be Black Dog's slave that the pale-face may be free. It is enough. Black Dog asks no more. The pale face shall go free!"

"Black Dog, you're a darned fool!" thundered Socorro Dan; "that boy 'll shoot you soon as he's at large! For heaven's sake! don't let him go! That girl won't be your squaw—she'll kill you!—she's a she-devil!"

"Black Dog has spoken," said the chief, calmly, and with proud disdain. "Let the pale-face go free."

A warrior advanced, and with evident reluctance cut the prisoner's bonds.

Little Fury rose to his feet. As he did so his eyes met those of Jeannette, and with a look of unutterable anguish upon his face, he advanced toward her, and was about to speak, when Socorro Dan staggered to his feet, snatched a revolver out of Trojan's belt, declaring:

"The young devil shall not leave here alive!"

He raised his revolver as he spoke, but Jeannette, who had anticipated his murderous intent, threw herself between him and Little Fury, and received the deadly bullet in her own heart, falling dead in Little Fury's arms!

With a cry like that of a wild beast Black Dog drew his tomahawk and sunk it to the eye in Socorro Dan's brain. At the same instant, almost, Captain Trojan shot the chief through the heart, and then, as one man, the warriors hurled themselves upon their white confederates, and a bloody conflict ensued.

Little Fury laid the dead girl upon the ground, folded her hands over her blood-stained breast, stooped and kissed the fair young brow, and then, with breaking heart, he turned away into the shadows ere the massacre of the Trojan Band had ended.

CHAPTER XIX.

KIT BANDY GETS "RATTLED."

AFTER leaving Florence Walworth Kit Bandy pushed out into the Sand Basin and approached the enemy's camp.

When within forty rods of it he got down and crawled on his hands and knees to within twenty paces of the foe. The latter were unusually demonstrative, and the old man knew something had happened that was a source of great rejoicing; he still mistrusted that some of his friends had fallen into their hands; but who could it be? Surely not Old Sabina.

It was not safe for him to venture closer, for the Indians were up, moving about, so he remained quiet for nearly an hour in hopes of gaining the information desired. But his patience was unrewarded.

At length Kit concluded to return to Florence Walworth, and falling back he began, as he supposed, retracing his footsteps to where he had left her. After traveling nearly a mile he discovered that he was going in the wrong direction. In circling the Indian camp he had lost his bearing and gone south instead of north.

"An awful blunder, for Kit Bandy," mused the old detective; "it's the first time it's happened in twenty years. Confound the blunder!"

Turning, the old detective struck northward on the double-quick, bearing to the right, so as to elude the Indian camp.

Suddenly he detected the outlines of what appeared to be a horseman moving down the plain across his path. He stopped and gave utterance to a peculiar whistle, and the next instant was answered in like manner.

"Hullo, Ichabod!" called the old detective.

"Here," was the laconic response, and a moment later the old pards were together.

"You've got around unharmed, I s'pose?" said Kit.

"Yes—how'd you come out, Kit?"

"Like a summer rose. I got back to the In-gin camp, belted Socorro Dan over the head, and dittoed a few savages, and sailed out with the gal."

"And is she who you thought?"

"She is—she's Florence Walworth; but say, Ichabod, I've made the nastiest blunder to-night I ever made."

"What's that, Kit?"

"Got lost in this basin. I left the gal on the

north side and went to reconnoiter the Ingins' camp, and in monkeyin' 'round there, I got turned around—rattled—and just now discovered where I was."

"Do you know, Kit, Little Fury is a captive in that Ingins camp?"

"Horn o' Joshua! no; but how did you find it out, Ichabod?"

"Run plump up against Old Tom Rattler 'while ago; he told me. The Ingins caught the boy at the mouth of Crow Wing Canyon."

"Where's Tom, now, the blessed old vagrant?"

"Gone to camp. Vaughn and five men are in a cave over north of the basin, waitin' till we can all get together. Tom went to tell them of your escape, and I've been lookin' for you. But Kit, see! there goes a torch northward from the Ingins camp. What's it mean?"

"The varmints must be tryin' to track me and the gal through the sand, cuss their picter! I'll try and head them off, and git the gal up to Vaughn's camp."

"And I," said Ichabod, "will watch them Ingins, and if they attempt to torture Little Fury I'll try and divert their attention until Vaughn and his party can come up to the rescue. They're waitin' for you."

After journeying together a little ways, the two men separated, Ichabod going toward the Indian camp, while Bandy struck out to head off the moving light.

However, before the old detective had made half the distance to Florence Walworth, he heard an Indian yell and saw the torch go out. The yell was one of savage triumph and was answered from camp, but what it meant, the old borderman could not determine.

Arriving at the base of the cliff, he crept along under the ledge, and, stopping, tapped on the rock with the muzzle of his revolver, then held his breath and listened, when, oh! blessed sound! he heard the soft tread of feet and then felt an arm thrust gently within his own.

"Thank God! I war afeard the devils had found you, Miss Flo," the old man said. "Now we'll git out o' this blackest, darkest spot on earth, and hurry away. The Lord has sent a number of friends to our rescue. Mayor Vaughn and five men, and Tom Rattler, are camped just round here in the defile, and we'll make tracks for that camp immediately."

Conducting his charge from beneath the ledge, he at once turned into the defile between the giant needles, as directed, and proceeded down the bed of the dry creek, which was nothing more than a narrow ribbon of dry white sand that made walking easy and noiseless.

The shadows from the overhanging bluffs deepened the darkness of night around them. Kit could just see that his charge was still enveloped, head and shoulders, in the blanket just as he had left her. Her face he could not see, for the hood the blanket made around it completely shaded it.

"Halt! who comes there?"

The challenge came from the darkness before them.

"Ka-ristopher Ko-lumbus Bandy and the heiress o' the Jolly Jane, Miss Walworth," answered Bandy, grandiloquently.

"Good," said the sentinel; "advance and enter the cave."

Bandy and his charge advanced to the speaker who took Kit by the hand and led him into a narrow, black rift, along which he conducted him several paces, then turned abruptly to the right into a lighted cavern wherein were seated five persons. And the very first thing Old Kit's eyes settled upon in that place was a young and lovely girl, seated at one side, with a faint smile upon her face—a face that he instantly recognized as that of Florence Walworth!

With the quickness of a cat the old man whirled around to the one still clinging to his arm—the one he supposed was Florence Walworth—when, to his utmost surprise and disgust, he beheld—not the fair face of a girl, but the grizzled, smiling countenance of Old Tom Rattler!

An explosion of laughter from the miners followed.

Kit Bandy stepped back, his eyes fixed on Rattler; then he drew his revolver and exclaimed:

"Tom Rattler, prepare to die!"

Florence Walworth uttered a little cry, and sprang between the old bordermen, begging in a tremulous voice:

"Don't kill him, Mr. Bandy, I pray! It was all in sport—a joke! I assure you he deceived me still worse, for I came all the way here with him supposing I was with you! When I saw

what I'd done, I sent him back to wait your coming at the rock."

"Horn o' Joshua!" exclaimed Kit, contemptuously, "passed his measley, runtified self for Kit Bandy! That's wuss yit; but, I'll spare the little ole walrus 'cause you ask it, gal. It's the last time, though."

"It seems to me," said Harry Vaughn, coming to Bandy's assistance, "that this has been a regular campaign of deception from the beginning of the week to the end, according to what I have heard this evening, and seen, also. It began in Red Ruin with Old Sol Soaker; then came the false Florence Walworth; then Salvation Sam, and last, but not least, Sabina Bandy, the wronged wife."

"You hav'n't heard 'bout Jeannette Colville, have you, Kit?" asked one of the miners.

"No; who's Jeannette Colville?" asked the old man.

Florence Walworth related, for the old detective's benefit, the story of her meeting with the girl Jeannette; the revelation she made about the Jolly Jane conspiracy, and the sacrifice the poor girl had made to protect her—Florence—from recapture.

"Then I was right 'bout the russet shoes," declared Bandy.

"Yes, Kitsie," averred Old Rattler, "while it are an easy thing for me to hornswoggle you on a purty gal racket, I'm free to confess that, as a mountain sleuth, you're a stupendous success, with a faculty for buildin' mountains outen mole-hills. Some one told me once the goblin' o' geese saved Rome. The difference in the color o' two gal's shoes—detected by the Argusian eye o' Old Kit Bandy—has led to the overthrow o' one o' the meanest conspiracies to defraud since the sar-pint entered Eden. Kitsie's sure o' heaven 'cause he'll fool St. Peter and go in as a respectable citizen on a pass."

"In which case," replied Kit, "I'll never see you, Tom, 'less you can steal in on somebody's arm as an innocent maiden. But, Tom, I understand Little Fury is in them Injuns' power."

"Yes, Kitsie," replied Tom, "and we should lose no time in tryin' to help the boy out. Them outlaws 'll be so all-killing mad when that gal, Jeannette, shows up in camp that they'll destroy the boy out o' pure cussedness, and the gal, too, mebbey."

"My pard, Ichabod Flea, is hoverin' 'round over there watchin' the red-skins," said Bandy; "but he'll not be able to help the boy, should he need it right sudden; so we'd better decide on some plan for his release, if sich a thing is possible. Thomas Rattler, what's your idea?"

"March right up into the basin, let ourselves loose in that Ingins camp and deestroy the varmints," was Tom's reply.

And the old hunter's plan seemed about the only one that was favorably entertained, and so preparations for the assault were speedily made; but before they were quite ready to leave the cave, who should come walking in but Ichabod Flea, alias Sabina Bandy, and Little Fury, himself!

A prolonged shout of joy greeted their coming, and for the next ten minutes that cavern was a scene of wild rejoicing. But all the while the face of Little Fury wore an expression of sadness—something no one had ever seen before upon his pleasant, happy countenance. But this was fully accounted for when he narrated the story of Jeannette's coming to the camp, her appeal to Black Dog in his behalf, and her untimely death while trying to save his life, at the hands of the desperado, Socorro Dan.

While all heard of Jeannette's tragic death with a feeling of sadness and regret, Florence Walworth was overwhelmed with grief by the dreadful news and wept most bitterly.

There was a portion of Little Fury's story, however, that was most gratifying to all who heard it, and that was of Jeannette's murder being avenged by the Indians' massacre of Socorro Dan and his entire gang of outlaws.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONCLUSION.

THE rescuing party passed the night in the cave without molestation, and by early dawn next morning they were to begin their homeward journey, or rather their return to Red Ruin camp.

Little Fury's pony had been found in the defile where Jeannette had left it, and upon its back Florence Walworth was given a seat, Tom Rattler, the eldest of the party, riding at her side on Sabina Bandy's mule.

The Indians, it was discovered early, had departed from Sand Basin before daylight, and as the whites moved across the valley toward the entrance to Crow Wing Canyon, Little Fury

expressed a desire to visit the savages' deserted camp, and so he, Kit Bandy and Harry Vaughn went around that way.

Reaching the camp a sickening sight met their view. The four outlaws, stripped of their clothing lay bloating in the morning sun. They had been scalped. The body of Black Dog, and those of his warriors slain in the mutinous conflict were gone. So was the body of Jeannette Colville, but a little searching revealed where it had been buried in the sand.

By Little Fury's request it was disinterred and found to have been carefully wrapped in a blanket, but buried in a shallow grave.

Tenderly the body was borne across the edge of the basin and given burial near the mouth of the canyon where beasts of prey could not disturb it. A heavy stone was placed over the grave, and the sad work was done.

As the three turned to rejoin their friends tears filled the eyes of the young scout.

Old Kit, whose heart was tender as any woman's, laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder and said:

"Whirlwind, it's a sad blow, for I know you loved that girl who gave her young life to save yours. God's will be done. We all have burdens to bear. It's the lot of man born of woman, and it's the burdens we bear that makes more earnest and determined the battle for immortal life."

Without any incident worthy of record Mayor Vaughn and his party, accompanied by Kit Bandy, Tom Rattler, Ichabod Flea, Florence Walworth and Little Fury, arrived at Red Ruin on the second day of their departure from Sand Basin.

The mayor found the camp in a state of confusion and disorder.

The supposed abduction of the heiress of the Jolly Jane, even by the resident conspirators, had almost deprived the miners of their reason. They were all at sea as to what they should do, and had been doing nothing for a day or two but talk, swear and quarrel.

But Vaughn soon set matters to right, and then treated the camp to a sensational surprise by having Dave Luce and Tac Barnes arrested, and by the revelations he made of the conspiracy to steal the Walworth interest in the Jolly Jane by the notorious Trojan Band of outlaws.

Then Florence Walworth, the true heiress, was introduced to the camp, which at once accepted the new order of things and ran wild with joy. Every miner turned out to a man—except Luce and Barnes, who could not get out—to do honor to the young lady, Little Fury and the gallant mountaineers, Kit Bandy and Tom Rattler.

The Vigilantes made short work of the arch conspirators, Luce and Barnes.

After the two villains had been executed the camp once more regained its normal condition and business was resumed as usual.

Mayor Vaughn was made executor of the estate of Dave Luce, and, as no heir appeared to claim his interest in the Jolly Jane, it became forfeited in the course of time, and, by unanimous consent, which is generally law in a mining-camp, it was escheated to Little Fury, the young scout, who had done such gallant service for Red Ruin.

Florence Walworth for several days was completely prostrated with sickness from the fear, suffering and sorrow through which she had passed. But in the mean time she was overwhelmed with kindness from the miners and the few noble women in camp.

Mayor Vaughn, by the girl's request, looked after her interest in the mine; and he not only did that, but took it upon himself to look after her personal welfare and comfort, also; and he did both so well that she rapidly recovered from her sickness, and grew to be more cheerful and contented. At first she had expressed her intention of selling out and leaving Red Ruin as soon as she was able to travel; but after her complete recovery she kept postponing her time of departure from week to week, until finally she gave up leaving entirely. The result of this was that she became the wife of Harry Vaughn, and the happiest woman in Red Ruin.

Kit Bandy and his pard, Ichabod Flea and Tom Rattler remained for nearly a week in Red Ruin, telling stories, cracking jokes and having a good time generally. The miners vied with each other in doing them honor, and there wasn't a man in camp who would acknowledge he had ever insulted Old Sol Soaker.

But the old detective had no fault to find, for he felt that the mission of Sol Soaker to Red Ruin had been a "voluminous" success.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,

98 William Street, New York.